











# ***OLD MOKE***

*By the same author*

**SURFACE !  
BURY THE PAST**

# *OLD MOKE*

A NOVEL

by

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Gentlemen,

*This is the story of James Doncaster, who was a coward for the first 50 years of his life.*

*By some people, he is regarded now as a traitor. That was the worst construction which they could put upon his disappearance, and naturally there were many who preferred it to any other.*

*Here I have written no theories, but the truth. It is only because Doncaster is not in a position to tell the story for himself that I have taken the liberty of writing it for him: and liberty, this is, for as much as I should like to, I cannot say that I ever was his friend.*

*My name, gentlemen,*



THROUGH the pain, which was bearable now because it had been so much worse, and because, too, he had become used to its presence, he forced his thoughts away over the miles—at once the initiation of a problem faced him, and he thought: Miles, seventeen hundred and sixty yards to the mile, I still know that, but how many miles? Damn it, he thought, his knuckles pressing hard into the cellar floor, now I'm into figures and I'm back where I started, where I can't think. He smiled at the floor which he could feel with his face but not see, and he said to it as though he were speaking apologetically to a mathematically inclined colleague in the common room: Never was any good at figures. (It wasn't easy to think, to fix the mind on a point or on a remembered scene, long enough to recognise it before it changed, throbbing into the filth of the cellar.) Back where I started, he thought, and suddenly, so easily that he could have laughed at the lack of effort which had brought it now to his fumbling mind, suddenly he saw it, and held it, and spoke aloud into the dirt under his face.

"Real! It's there, now!" His fists opened, not feeling the grit biting into the knuckles, and his palms accepted and welcomed the filth into his own joy, seeing—how far? Again he spoke aloud, his lips brushing the floor. "Nearly a thousand." Now he'd lost

the picture again, but he'd had to do it, to answer that question of the miles: had to get to the picture honestly, without leaving a gap in the road. Near'y a thousand miles, he thought, and again, over the distance and the pain, over the knowledge that his body was broken and would be broken further, he saw it, and seeing it he smiled in the dark, into the dirt which he could touch with his lips, torn and shapeless as they were. He smiled, and told himself, trembling with excitement: There, still! But the memory and the vision clouded, and the present came instead, horror to balance bliss, fact to stifle imagination. It came down like a clamp, viciously insisting on the pain and stench and lack of hope, on this present reality which was worse than the most dreadful of nightmares, far worse because, from this, which was no dream, there could be no awakening. Even in the numbed state to which they had brought him, he knew that it would end here: he watched it coming with a horror not only of their brutality and his consequent pain but also of his own cowardice.

He thought: But I saw it! I saw the green and the white and the grey stone behind them, the blue which the green sweeps up to meet, I saw it! It's there! But quickly: Only in a dream, never again know it, and never be able to tell them how this was. They'll not know, and in their hearts they'll give me no right to my place with them. Hardly he thought again: It's my right, all mine as much as theirs, perhaps more because I needed it more. But they'll give me no place. They'll label me coward, and traitor, which by then I will be, because I know that before these others



finish with me they'll have my signature on that paper.

Thinking of the signing, he shifted the fingers of his right hand, and he recognised for the first time that the worst pain was that behind the nails on the fingers, where the quicks were scorched. He pressed his face against the foul stones which floored the cellar, and he said to the stones, pleading with them, *I'm an Englishman, a schoolmaster, I'm fifty years of age, and I have never spied.*

He fell asleep, and in sleep his mind reached easily to the image which, awake, he had fought towards with all his failing strength and then held for only a moment's passing, mind and moment passing and slipping back into the sprawled body, too close to what was fact, too horrified by it to escape from it for longer than a moment. But in sleep his mind found it and held it, saw its face and smelt its smell, owned it, swung to it as a ship swings comfortably to an anchor. And beyond his dream, it was there, as he saw it. Nothing was changed. It was as it had been a year ago, when he had been a part of it, or twenty-five years ago, when he had been closer to it still, only then less conscious of its power. Deep green of the playing-fields stretched possessively between the grey stone of the school buildings and the lighter green, the start of the Downs' upward sweep, rising to the sharp curved edge where sky began: any man's sky, but down again, not any man's the heavy green and the white goalposts needle-sharp, the old grey stone and the softness, soft country falling easily towards the ancient spires

of Lewes. Not any man's. Not his, now, except in sleep.

Mrs Doncaster looked out of place on the touch-line, although she looked what she was, a schoolmaster's wife, dressed as one dresses to watch a football match on an autumn afternoon, and although, farther down the line, other wives were watching the game. Perhaps it was the bulk of the headmaster towering beside her, making her more frail, more feminine than she was even in her own nature: perhaps her standing there with him, at a distance from the others, the assistant masters and their wives, accentuated her isolation, making its reality as plain to see as the slim sturdy goalposts' white against the deep damp green of the field.

Not that they avoided her (they were decent people and normal, so that an urge to comfort her went with an interest in the scandal and, if anything, they sought her company) but more that she deliberately removed herself from them, excusing herself on varied grounds from social contacts. Only the headmaster was not to be avoided, giving her whether she responded or not the solid protection of his authority, blandly ignoring the newspapers' versions of her husband's disappearance. Privately he wondered for what purpose the Russians would wish to harbour Jim Doncaster, even if Doncaster had wished to go to them. The headmaster had only kept Doncaster on the staff out of kindness, and only engaged him in the first place because it was a Hollowstone tradition to have Old Boys as masters.

Mrs Doncaster watched with the others, watched Tommy Braid flying ahead with the insides neatly distanced at his right and left and the ball clinging to the toes of his boots as though they were magnets and the ball made of tin like the ball out of a cistern. He's good, she thought, watching the short legs carry the boy speeding towards the opposing backs, and at that moment he snapped the ball cracking to the wing, angling his own run out as the insides slowed, passing the backs, who by now were too far out from their goal, the ball swinging in again to the inside left with the goal in range. She thought: Poor Tommy Braid. He loved Jim. The kid still stands up for him, she thought, and a wave of anger swept up inside her at the thought that he'd let down not only her but also a fine little boy like Tommy Braid, who'd given his trust to the grown man, her husband. Whatever the facts, she thought, bitter at her own doubt, here was the result, here was what he'd left them both.

"Well played, Hollows!" The headmaster's bellow brought her to earth. Tommy'd scored, again. The headmaster said:

"Every match won this season. Touch wood." Mrs Doncaster smiled. "The season's not over yet, remember." She didn't give a damn who won or lost. The headmaster added quickly, speaking straight out of his principles:

"A good thing as far it goes. But I won't have them seeing it as anything more than a game. In some schools, matches assume an importance out of all proportion to the part they play in school life. I won't

have that." He broke off to shout, "Well done, young Braid! Keep it up, Hollows!" And Mrs Doncaster smiled again. 'Pompous Porpoise' the boys called him, the same as they called her husband 'Old Moke'. Both names fitted—or had done. She looked across at Tommy Braid, standing opposite the centre-line facing the ball, eager, waiting for the whistle, his bullet head turning quickly this way and that, the other forwards watching him, anxious, waiting for his lead. A cloud drifted over the field, its shadow passing darkly across and into the trees. The headmaster asked her:

"Jean, why don't you go away for a bit? Holiday. Get away from this, rest?" She didn't answer, both of them staring out across the field until he spoke again, gruffly. "Nothing's proved."

"Nothing ever will be. That other man—two of them—they vanished too. Nobody knows and everyone knows. Why, I—what for, what use he can hope, or they . . ."

The headmaster coughed. Under the circumstances, it was the safest thing to do. He'd learnt the value of a cough carefully employed. In this case, though, it might perhaps be inadequate on its own. He told her, still watching the play:

"'nt jump to conclusions. Anything may have happened." He coughed again. "Anything." Mrs Doncaster wasn't listening: she pointed at the boys milling round the invisible ball.

"Tommy Braid, I'm told, has a black eye. I haven't seen him closely. Is it true? I heard he got it because he stood up for my husband, in the dormitory." (He

was there again, Braid, as before, the ball glued to his toes.) The headmaster said quietly:

"Young Braid was always very fond of your husband." Mrs Doncaster turned away, stared at the tall tracing of boughs behind the brown-and-white pavilion.

"Well played, Hollows! Well played!" Another goal—the touchline was alive with youthful delight. Mrs Doncaster turned back again, and waved one gloved hand. She, too, shouted with the others, and Braid, passing close on his way back from a chat with the wing, waved to her. She saw that he had, indeed, one blackened eye, and she saw, too, that he bore the injury as though he were proud of it, like the scar from an honourable duel. After the match, she thought, he'll very likely come and show it to me, explain how he got it defending my husband's honour. She thought: His honour! Dear God, can't they *all* hate him, can't they *all* despise him? It'd be so easy then, so easy to hate them back. . . .

Cool and green and ageless, the playing-fields stretched from the school buildings to the edge of the Downs, lay fat and well fed amongst the trees which dotted their borders and served as a heavy backdrop to the pavilion. For generation upon generation, thought Mrs Doncaster, boys have played their games on this brilliant green, under this changing English sky. Even I, comparatively a stranger, feel and love this power of continuity, this sense of rootedness, here where I stand, the stem of so many lives. And yet my husband, who himself was schooled here and should have had this deep in his heart,

compelling and undeniable, strong in his blood like the very love of England herself, which is enough in most Englishmen for their lives to be worth living, for no other reason than that they serve England—and yet my husband, Jim Doncaster, has chosen to betray me and his country and Tommy Braid as well. They've spread his name in heavy type across the front pages of newspapers, and little Braid, who is only thirteen years old, has to fight with his fists because he won't believe the truth. Mrs Doncaster watched Braid's muddy, disreputable little figure as it crossed the field, fighting for new command of the ball, and she cried inside her: Tommy, he isn't worth it. He never was. She bit her lip, and cried inside her: Never was worth it. Save your temper and your fists. Save your loyalty. Don't waste it on a traitor.

But who's the traitor, she asked herself, Jim or I? Does he, or do I, tired of the doubt, the alternative of believing or condemning, choosing the second because I never believed and can't now, does he or do I take first prize for treachery? And again she asked herself: As a woman, a man's wife, shouldn't I *know*, one way or the other? But I don't know at all. All I feel is angry and sick and let down. I'd like it over and done with. To go to sleep for a year and wake up and find it was a nightmare.

Majerle, the Yugoslav, was shaking him by the arm. Doncaster knew this for some minutes before he acknowledged that he was in fact awake, or that he knew, as he did, that it was Majerle who was taking

so much trouble to bring him out of sleep. He knew that it was Majerle, because, although he spoke no word of the man's language and could only guess at the meaning of his mutterings, he had from the first recognised and liked some quality in the voice. Now, lying there, letting the other man waste precious energy, Doncaster wondered what it could be in the voice that he recognised and even listened for, but in the harsh, metallic sounds there was no answer to his question, no word or sound or intonation where he could say: Here is the ring of a familiar bell.

Majerle had great patience, such patience as can be learned best where a lack of it leads to pain increased or death brought nearer, and he shook the Englishman's arm with the same quiet persistence, not increasing the pressure or shaking more violently as the minutes passed, only continuing the movement, gently: he was a man experienced in pain, and in this place where pain was the enemy's weapon he took care not to augment it, not wanting his strange, inarticulate companion to start loudly to his knees when some sleep-deadened nerve should spring to life and carry its message of pain to the startled brain.

For his part, Doncaster knew that Majerle would not be trying to waken him for any but a good reason, because in the cell they shared, besides the knowledge of pain, that of the value of sleep, of the healing power of rest, its contribution to a man's resistance to more questions and more pain. Pain: Doncaster asked himself, while Majerle vibrated his arm, do I know it all, yet? Is there still some to learn? There must be, he

thought, there must be more. Else I'd have given way before now. I never could face even a dentist's drill, not even the prick of the needle, the sight of an instrument . . . I've held out so far against this, but I know that there must be more, worse and more. And even if there isn't, even if it'll only be the same over and over again, not for months but for years, even if it's just that and nothing new I won't hold out, not on and on and no future except pain. He turned his head sideways, resting his left cheek on the stones, and he asked:

"How long have you been here, Majerle?" Of course, it was a waste of time talking English to the Slav, but Doncaster's only language other than English was French, and even that meant nothing to Majerle. Doncaster spoke to him as a man talks to his dog, expecting no answer, deriving in himself the benefit of the useless words. (But the French was useful: in French he spoke to old Studeny, the Pole, and to Anna, who was said to be a prison spy, and through those two as interpreters he could speak to others in the cell.)

Majerle let go of Doncaster's arm, and pointed at the bowl of thin grey porridge, acceptable, as they said in one of the cell's dry jokes, to pigs and prisoners of the soviet. Majerle's dark eyes under the heavy brows showed none of the softness which must have prompted his action in waking Doncaster. In his own tongue he growled, unsmiling:

"Eat your breakfast." Doncaster nodded, only once, not wasting effort, and stretched out one hand to encircle the bowl, establishing his claim to it before



some stronger cellmate could drink it down and answer any complaint with the heel of his foot. They were not all of them as sick as the Englishman. Majerle watched, himself a gaoler in the command of his glowering eyes, and seeing that Doncaster had made no move to drink, he pointed angrily at the bowl, like a mother with a wayward child. In Jugoslav he said again: "Eat!" Doncaster raised himself on his left elbow, and drew the bowl closer so that he could reach it with his mouth. Majerle nodded, satisfied, and rising slowly to his feet he sought a way, unsteadily, towards the farther corner of the cell, to the 'parasha', the communal bucket which was emptied once a day.

Doncaster gulped at the cold, grey liquid. Its smell reminded him of a time he'd spent when he'd been six—seven?—years old on a farm in Bucks. He'd been brought up in France, where his parents had lived to escape what had seemed in their day to be excessive taxes and when they came back to England they spent a month or so at the farm while the manor house which they'd bought was being repainted and re-roofed. The boy had worked, as a child works, for the fun of it, with the farmer's sons who worked because they had to, and the smell which he remembered now was the smell of the sties. He'd carried the swill to their troughs, every morning in buckets, and he'd stayed to watch and listen while the pigs ate with obvious pleasure, snorting their pleasure into the trough, stirring the mess with their blunt, white-whiskered snouts. Yet in those days, or anyway as he remembered them now, the pigfood had smelt

wholesome and clean, and he had felt no surprise at the pigs liking it. While this—he stared at the unpleasant remnants in his bowl—this, he would not have expected them to eat. Certainly Mick and Mike, the almost house-trained pigs who had the run of the farmyard instead of being confined to the sty, would never have considered this as food. Mick and Mike had the privilege of being ridden by young Doncaster and the other children, and also the pleasure of dropping them off sideways into the muddy yard, pigs and children squealing with excitement, and they fed better than ordinary pigs. Thinking of them, Doncaster remembered, too, a day of tears, when Mick and Mike were slaughtered, and he heard their screams, not pig-shrieks, but screams near human, and Doncaster the child had wept in bitter, lonely sorrow, knowing for the first time the meaning of pain and death and finality and loss, no answer to the pleading and the beating hands, only a farmer's easy grin and no more Mick-and-Mike.

He drained the last dregs of porridge into his mouth, and from habit tasted nothing, but he smelt it, and by contrast in his memory he envied the pigs which he had fed by the bucket so many years ago. Pushing the bowl away, he laid his head down on his hands, and he spoke to himself, slowly, needing little effort in his memory, repeating to the stones: "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."

Majerle lowered himself to the ground close by: he raised his hand, to pillow his shaggy head, and accidentally with the back of his hand he struck the

empty porridge-bowl so that it rang quickly, sharp and oddly clear in the cell's quiet. In Majerle's eyes sudden rage flared, and his heavy brows seemed to bristle anger at the bowl itself. His arm flew out and he seized the bowl, sent it whirling at the iron door, where it crashed and clattered on the stones. The cell rose in alarm, frightened, muttering, and from another corner old Anna yelled, shrilly, obscenities ready to her bitter tongue.

Doncaster lay still, and Majerle, ignoring the commotion he had caused, lay back and closed his eyes. Studeny, too, slept on, his grey hairs resting in the filth, and close by, Slota, the mad Pole, mumbled to himself as he did all day and all night, asleep or awake, so that they could never tell for certain whether in sleep he was awake, or whether, awake, his wild mind rested in its own weird cradle.

Sane or mad, one tongue or the other, the question from the cell was the same from each soul in it: My turn today? Will it be my name called? And—How long will it last, how bad can it be?

Doncaster knew that today it'd be for him that they'd call. For others as well, but anyway for him. For two days they'd left him in the cell without a call, and that hadn't happened since he'd first arrived. Others spent weeks alone with the scared crowd around the dribbling parasha, but those were ordinary prisoners, not tired old English history-masters. What the others had to confess was chicken-feed, routine. But Doncaster—'Old Moke', as the boys had called him—was dynamite. He was the man who was going to sign a written confession of being

a paid agent of the notorious Anglo-American imperialist fascist anti-democratic reactionary war-mongering bandit conspiracy directed against the peace-loving soviet and against her sister members of the enlightened-by-Marxist-culture free democratic workers' states.

Doncaster, the little English schoolmaster, was going to sign, and, when he'd signed, the world was going to hear about it. Certain special friends—a couple of bitter Indians, and a single demented English priest—would even be allowed to see the signature. *Pravda* had an oversize caption ready for the press: it was only a matter of time before it could be used.

There was no question of the Englishman *not* signing. He was there in the cell. Upstairs, Loskutov and Kapanen had their offices and knew their jobs. Grauermann, who ran the place, had not a single doubt in their joint ability. He had picked them himself, and supervised their training: it was a source of immense personal satisfaction to him now that they had, at the end of their training, no human feelings whatsoever. Grauermann had a crack team in those two, and there were many others in the Service whom he'd trained. He was known as The Little Father, and more than once he'd been tipped as one of Beria's blue-eyed boys.

The prison was waking up. From the cell's deep quiet they could hear Toivo, the Russian gaoler, collecting the empty bowls from cells farther along the cold, stone passage. Nobody could really dislike

Toivo. He was 'simple', and he could not be held responsible for his actions, except by his superiors, and they beat him sometimes for his kindness. He moved through his duties like a clumsy machine, and if occasionally his treatment of the prisoners was brutal, well, they were used to brutality and so was he. He had the brain as well as the appearance of an ape, and he could not be blamed for that. So long as a prisoner did not insult him, or hinder him in the performance of his duties, Toivo could be even gentle. He might well have been created in some Frankenstein experiment: certainly his face, judging by its appalling ugliness, could have been thrown together from a distance by an amateur Picasso working in grey plasticine.

Now Toivo's blunt finger pressed the switch outside in the passage, and the sudden brilliant light flooded down into the cell from the overhead bulbs in their metal cages. The lock grated and the door swung open: nobody moved. Toivo stood squarely in the doorway, nearly filling it, staring down at the sprawled bodies. He said:

"Parasha. Who's parasha?" Slota, the mad Pole, scrambled to his knees. "Me," he muttered, and stayed on his knees through a fit of coughing. There was blood on the stones under his face, from the coughing. Nobody else moved, and Toivo waited heavy and dumb while the fit passed. Slota wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and blinked at the gaoler. He said again:

"Me, Toivo." The gaoler watched him, expressionless while Slota dragged himself across the cell,

avoiding the bodies, heading for the big cast-iron pail. He began to drag it towards the door, and those in its path drew away, crowding into the others, leaving a clear path for the Pole and his burden of filth. Even Toivo stepped into the cell, leaving the doorway clear. Toivo was a reasonable man, when he was not angry or afraid. Slota had stopped, gripped again by the coughing, and patiently, quite without expression, Toivo stood and watched him. Toivo's face was not capable of expression: the features were rigid always in their animal stupidity and this was a danger because a prisoner had no warning of impending rage.

While the Pole was gone, busy with his turn of duty in the yard, Toivo stood silently, ignoring the eyes upon him, staring at the flat surface of the door as though it held some interesting message for him, although its only inscription was the Russian letter B and the figure 2, in white paint. Slota reappeared, dragging the empty parasha. It was, of course, less heavy, but the effort to him was no less because the exertion had tired him. He dragged the weight behind him through the door and into the cell, passing as far away from the gaoler as he could, and casting him a single, cringing glance as he passed. Toivo stared dumbly at the wretched, terrified Pole, and then those who were close enough saw the movement in his muscled jaw as he prepared to speak. Slota backed away, jerking his burden rapidly across the floor.

Toivo's voice was high-pitched, almost feminine, a shock when it came from his powerful, bull-like frame.

"Djelt. Anna Djelt." The old woman scrambled to

her knees and out of the door all in one swift movement, like a witch's sudden flight. Toivo backed through the doorway, and stared after her down the passage. His left hand rose slowly to grasp the ring on the outside of the heavy door, and still staring down the passage he dragged the door slowly shut, leaving them alone under the hard light. Alone with the question still unanswered: Whose call today, whose turn? They heard the rasp and clash of the lock, and Slota crouched on his knees, coughing, his face hidden in his long, thin hands. Old Studeny, whose name as a surgeon had at one time been famous throughout the world, heaved his broad shoulders up to lean, sitting, against the wall. He looked over at the Pole, and he said:

"That fellow won't last long. Not a week at this rate." His remark was addressed in Czech to Franz Walzel, who had once directed a bank. They were of the same age, and had friends in common, outside. But Walzel's eyes were dead and there was no life in him: he hadn't Studeny's strength. In a thin, tired voice he answered:

"Can't you help him at all?" But there was no interest in the question, no thought for the answer. Walzel himself was under sentence of death. Studeny looked amused.

"I, help him? . . . Yes, I could. If I had a knife. So could you. It requires no medical knowledge to kill a man. Why, our friend Toivo out there can do it with his boots. Remember?" Studeny chuckled, and Doncaster asked him in French:

"Something amuses you?"

"It is nothing, my friend. We prattle nonsense to pass the time. One must stay alive until one dies—or pretend to be alive, even when there is no life. Perhaps, though, this *is* life, revealed in its truest form. It is an idea, don't you think?" Doncaster blinked at him, hearing the words like gravel rattling against a window, only words and no meaning.

"Sorry. I don't seem to——"

"Can it not be that all life is only a matter of waiting to die? That God has a gap in the schedule of our evolution from one revolting thing to another, and no use for us during this space, this gap, so he makes a world and puts us into it, a waiting-room before the next process. . . . So here or there, it is of little consequence, although we would not, of course, choose to wait in a place of this type, if we were given a choice. No. But we still die. Believe me, I have seen it often, not only here. Men die, and most of them are not satisfied when they die, and thus one can say that most men—and women—die unhappy." Studeny smiled. "An encouraging thought, is it not, to know that we are not alone in our situation?" Under the broad forehead his deep-set, understanding eyes watched Doncaster, smiling. Studeny's was a strong face, the face of a man who had no inward doubts of himself. He was the sort of man that Doncaster would have liked to be. Doncaster looked away, and muttered:

"It's time they sent down. I've a feeling that——"  
Studeny laughed. He said:

"Haven't we *all* that feeling every morning? Is not every man in this drawing-room certain at this



moment that his name will be called? Hey, Franz, are *you* not thinking that you will be called?" Walzel stared at Studeny, gravely, and slowly nodded. "I expect it every day", he agreed. Studeny had forgotten: forgotten that in Walzel's case it was not just a case of pain to come, but death. But then, he thought, which is worse? He told Walzel:

"You're lucky. Only one more call for you. *We've* lots more little games ahead of us. They're letting you off easily because you're rich." But Walzel showed no appreciation of his good fortune, and presently Studeny had started a discussion on the subject of food values and the nutritive power of thin soup. Doncaster asked him:

"How many calories are there in, say, one fried sausage?" It was the last thing in his mind, which was sick with fright, but he didn't want Studeny to see his weakness. For some reason, he needed to show up well with Studeny. The doctor answered, seriously:

"That must, of course, depend upon two things. First, upon the contents of the sausage, and, secondly, upon its size. Take a good pork sausage, now, such as no longer exists in our unfortunate country, a reasonably sizeable sausage, fried——"

They watched his fingers measuring out the sausage, then his hands cupping to form a plate, he staring down as though a sausage really lay there, fat and brown, perhaps still sizzling a little. Someone said:

"Careful. You'll burn your fingers." Nobody laughed: they were too engrossed in watching the sausage. Studeny continued:

"Why, such a sausage ——" The lock grated, and Toivo flung the door open. Standing there squarely with his hand on the ring, he called in his eunuch's voice:

"Don'ster. Donster. Angliski, Donster." Doncaster moved forward towards the door as though a rope had suddenly been thrown around his neck and drawn tight, taut to the doorway and beyond. He didn't hear Studeny call softly:

"I'll keep your sausage warm, mon cher. Till you come back."

Majerle looked worried. He muttered: "Strength to him. Strength to the Englishman." Studeny glanced curiously at the Yugoslav.

"Why? What's he to you, this little Englishman?" Majerle's fingers fiddled with his bearded chin. His eyes were dark, and he had the look of a man who gave nothing of himself away. It made his anxiety for the Englishman all the stranger. He told Studeny:

"He's a weakling. Soft inside. Once he cracks——"

"Yes?" Studeny looked interested. Majerle grunted, and closed his eyes.

"Excuse me, Doctor. I would like to sleep." Studeny watched, and saw that, although the other man lay quiet with his eyes closed, he did not sleep. Studeny thought: You have a reason, my friend, and you will not speak of it. All right, keep your secret. Lie there and worry about your Englishman.

All that any of us have left, thought Studeny, are secrets. And when we have lost those, when they have wrenched them from us, we are finished, like

Walzel, fit for nothing but a hole in the yard. God give us the strength to keep our secrets, he thought, and in his heart he echoed Majerle's plea: Strength to the Englishman, to us all.

Loskutov had a face that could have been pleasant, if it'd been given a chance in life. Looking at it, you could see that if he'd led a happy, normal childhood and youth, if he'd been taught the value of a sense of humour, and if later a few women other than whores had smiled at him now and then, he might now have looked like something human. In fact, there were times when humanity did creep into the picture's shading, and then it was that the shock came. Loskutov was a sensitive creature, and the minute he saw a prisoner looking at him in that way, that half-hoping, wondering way (the prisoner thinking: Why, perhaps with this one I've a chance!) his face changed, eyes dying in their sockets, caverns deepening at the corners of the straight, traplike mouth, coolness and trained cruelty seeping out of the skin.

He had a bald patch in the centre of his head, and Moke saw nothing else. The light from an unshaded bulb shone down on it, and Loskutov sat over his desk, the bald patch facing Moke, Loskutov writing, writing, covering page after page of the yellow foolscap with spidery Cyrillic script while Moke stood rigid in front of the desk, waiting for the explosion.

There had to be an explosion. It was the Loskutov technique, his way of opening an interview. He'd leave his man standing, as Moke was standing now,

for a couple of hours, and during that time he'd write, or read, and never give a hint that he was aware of the man's presence. Only fear kept Moke on his feet. If he'd tried standing that long in his cell, he'd have collapsed long before this. But in the cell, like all the others, he'd learnt to save his strength, to store his resistance against the time when he'd need it. A time like this. Now, fear kept him up, so that he'd stood, already for a hundred and forty minutes. Loskutov leant over the desk, writing, occasionally referring to notes in an official cardboard folder, and not once in all that time had he even glanced at the Englishman.

Moke didn't think about anything. Most of the time his blank eyes were fixed on the badge on Loskutov's arm, a scarlet oval, a sword striking down at the rearing serpent. The badge of the MGB, the Ministry of State Security. The more vicious arm of the MVD who had succeeded the NKVD. They were all the same. And the serpent under the sword was Moke. He stood there frozen, tensed against the shock of Loskutov's coming assault. As long as he didn't move or speak or ask for any relief, Loskutov's opening move would be only verbal. Moke knew that if he moved or spoke, worse still if he fell, it'd be boots before words: it wasn't his first interview, this, and the lessons of the prison were quickly learnt. No, his mind had no room for thought. Only for the sword and the serpent and the fright in the serpent which had no fangs and wanted only peace, or at the most outrageous, freedom.

Loskutov looked up at him, quickly, two pale eyes taking over from the shiny circle of baldness. He said:

"I know it by heart, you know. I write it all down and I need hardly ever glance at the original. It's too easy, isn't it? Once upon a time I used to wonder how a lie could last so long without a change. Eh?" Moke gaped at him, the rabbit trying to humour the ferret.

"I don't—I'm sorry, but what——" Loskutov turned purple. His dead eyes bulged, glaring, and his lips which had always been straight and thin were now the blades of a double-sided guillotine. He shouted, the veins standing out in his neck and across his forehead:

"Fool! D'you think we're going to be taken in by a stupid English spy? D'you think you can make me believe that you don't know what I'm talking about? Eh? Answer me, you English trash, answer!" He gave Moke no time to answer, Moke standing there like a child facing a gale and frightened, and Loskutov shouted:

"D'you think you can fool *me*?" Moke shook his head.

"No. Indeed, I——" Loskutov seemed not to hear him. He sat back in the chair, breathing heavily. In sudden quiet he said:

"Doncaster. We have heard your story from you on several occasions. Never has a word been out of place. Never. You know it by heart, you see, that's why. Doncaster, I am tired. I do not like this—this questioning. Nor do I like this——" He pulled a drawer open, and laid on the desk a long-nosed pair of pliers. Beside them he placed, neatly, a couple of sailmaker's needles. He looked up from them, straight

up into Moke's shocked eyes, but those were on the tools which he had met before. He couldn't look anywhere else. Loskutov rapped sharply on the desk with his fist.

"Your attention!" Moke transferred his gaze to the steady, lifeless eyes of the Russian. "Thank you. As I said, you have always the same silly answers—which we know in any case to be lies. Lies!" His voice swelled with rising passion.

"You know them by heart and I tell you I am tired of them—*tired!*" Loskutov leant forward to flourish the sheaf of papers under Moke's nose. In fear and nothing else Moke closed his eyes, as a man blinks against a blow, and as he did so the storm broke in its full force. He heard the fury in Loskutov's sharply caught breath, and he recognised the coming cyclone in that second before it struck. Loskutov screamed in his face:

"So you close your eyes, you filthy fascist spy? You close your filthy prying eyes? Eh? You don't like to listen to me, so you close your dirty ears as well, eh? Well, here's a thing you can't close yourself up against, you English muck—look!" Moke looked. Loskutov was holding over his head the hard wooden chair which he'd been sitting on. A kitchen chair, Moke thought, fear making him want to raise his hands to shield it off, greater fear keeping his hands down by his sides, the fear of worse reprisals for resistance to punishment. He said to Loskutov's savage, maddened eyes:

"I couldn't——" and the chair came down, smashing into his upturned face.

"Get up." Loskutov was quiet, again. "Get up. Don't pretend you're hurt. I'll hurt you, all right, in time, if you don't wake up, but I haven't yet. Get up." Moke scrambled to his feet, getting there with the wall's help. Loskutov sank wearily on to a corner of his desk. "All right", he said. "All right. If we can't change your story, we can't. We've only been trying to help you. Your story's a pack of lies, and the Court won't be taken in for a moment. That's why we've been trying to get the truth out of you. You'd be better off, in the long run. . . . Your own people won't back you, you know. Once a spy's caught, he's cat's meat. Anybody's meat. Nobody cares. Not even your fascist Churchill." Doncaster listened, the tips of his fingers behind his back affording him some slight support against the wall. Blood was running down his face from several wounds, some of them old ones reopened and some of them fresh, and he felt the wetness building up in his beard. Loskutov gazed sadly at him, like a disappointed parent. He said:

"Well, if you won't let us help you, you won't. You'd better sign this stupid statement of yours, and we'll send it off." He flipped at the foolscap pages with the back of his hand. "It won't do you any good, but you can't say we haven't tried. Still, if you insist on sticking to your lies——" He threw back the top sheets, exposing the last one, the lower half of it blank. He dropped the wad of paper on to the desk, and laid beside it the pen he'd been using.

"More fool you", he said, glumly. "But since you won't be helped—sign this nonsense."

Moke edged forward towards the desk. He missed



the support of the wall, and he moved stiff-legged, slowly. His groping hand managed to find the pen: he could only see out of one eye, and even with that the vision was clouded. He peered closely at the paper, his pen poised, and Loskutov said easily, persuasively:

"Just sign." Moke drew the papers towards him, and bent, trying to ignore the hurt in his back. He moved the pen awkwardly in his hand until it rested as he remembered a pen should, the feel of it on two fingers and the ball of the thumb. He muttered:

"I can't read this. Russian. I don't understand." Still in the easy voice, Loskutov told him, from two feet away:

"I've translated it for you. You don't think the Court would understand English, do you?" Moke looked up at him, out of the one eye.

"No. You're tricking—this isn't what I——" Loskutov snatched the pen out of Moke's fingers, using his own left hand, and with his right fist he struck the Englishman squarely in the mouth. Moke was thrown backwards against the wall, and from there he sank to his knees, silent, seeing nothing but pain and the red glimpse of light, sobbing without sound, knowing without thought that until he signed there would only be this and worse, and also that his refusal to sign was not courage but the knowledge which they all of them shared, the knowledge that once he'd signed he'd be finished, not worth more than that hole in the ground with Walzel. Without knowing why, he still wanted to live. His knees slumped outwards and he slid forwards on to his face.

Loskutov ignored him, glancing through the sheets of cheap paper, hissing the breath through his teeth. He moved round from behind the desk, and jerked the door open. He shouted:

"Toivo! Hey there, Toivo, you rubbish! Bring me something to eat!" He stared down at Moke. "You. You're not here to rest. Get up." Moke didn't hear him. All he could hear was Slota crying to himself in a corner of the cell, Majerle's voice saying: "Eat!" Loskutov bent and grasped Moke's shoulders. He pulled him up so that he rested against the wall, his head lolling. Toivo walked in stolidly with a tray in his hands, and laid it on the desk.

Loskutov left Moke, and stepped over to the desk to inspect his breakfast. He asked Toivo, pleasantly enough:

"Who's eating all the cheese? You?" Toivo stared at him, unmoved.

"You want more than that?"

"Of course I do. Not enough there to catch a mouse with. I want a lot more." Toivo grunted, and turned away. Loskutov stopped him in the doorway. "Toivo. Bring a bucket of water, too." The gaoler shuffled away, and Loskutov shouted after him, "And a new chair!" Moke heard Studeny whisper: Sausages and cheese and a new chair for the sake of the calories. Calories per sausages and chairs and cheese and chairs aren't made to sit on. Studeny's trying to be funny, Moke thought, and he's not funny because he's scared like the rest of us, only he's old in persecution and he was a friend of Mazaryk and so he tries to keep my spirits up. Never managed

that myself, much, and now I can't see the joke. But it had to come, I always knew I couldn't get away with being a coward in private. I always knew it had to come, one way or another, it had to. Aloud he said: Someone ought to tell Slota to stop crying: it makes him cough.

Loskutov said to Toivo:

"Pour it over his head. All of it." Toivo obeyed the order, but grudgingly: he knew he'd have to mop it up, later. Moke stared up at him, then, but the light hurt his eye and he shut it again. Like a baby producing its first word he said, "Toivo". Toivo turned away, jiggling the empty bucket. Loskutov told him:

"Shut the door behind you." Moke heard the words, although Loskutov had his mouth full of cheese and spoke thickly through it. It's Russian, thought Moke, that language, and for all that he understood it might have meant: Bring me a whip. When the door shut, Loskutov asked him:

"Aren't you hungry?" Moke moved his lips and the movement hurt. He didn't answer the question, and Loskutov mumbled, his mouth full again:

"I thought Englishmen had big appetites. Don't you want to join me?" This was Studeny, the kind voice, this Majerle, the offered food. Moke nodded, and opened his working eye.

"Well, come and help yourself. Don't sit there staring." Moke swayed forwards and got his hands on to the floor. He gathered his legs in slowly, and climbed on to his knees. On his knees, he shuffled over to the desk, his face a few inches from the food. He looked at Loskutov out of the eye, and steadied

himself with one hand on the desk's edge. Loskutov cut a piece from the cheese, and pushed it across. Moke stared at it, not believing that it could be for him.

"Go on," Loskutov urged him cheerfully. "Eat it. There's plenty more." Crumbs fell from his lips as he spoke. Moke tried to smile, and raised his other hand to the desk, groped for the cheese. He felt it with his fingers, and waited.

"Eat it, or I will." Moke scooped it into his mouth and swallowed without tasting or chewing.

"More?" Moke nodded, and Loskutov passed another cube over on the end of his knife. Moke ate that one too, and this time he tasted it. Loskutov pushed back his chair, and came round the desk. He said, looking down at Moke:

"You can't eat on your knees. Look——" He picked up the broken chair: it had two sound legs, and one that wobbled, but it stood. Loskutov bent, and picked Moke up as though he were a baby, sat him on the chair. He said: "Mind you sit still, or you'll fall. Now—more cheese?" Moke nodded, delighted. Given a chance, he'd have shaken Loskutov's hand, patted him on the back. Cheese.

"Look. Before you make a pig of yourself—let's just sign this, eh?" Loskutov pushed the pen into Moke's cheese hand. "I'll help you, since you seem a bit weak." The Russian's hand closed over Moke's, and lowered it to the paper. "Then you can eat all you want."

"No." The pen's nib straddled itself on the yellow paper, spattering ink. Loskutov's rage burst out like

a tiger's snarl, and he kicked savagely at the three-legged chair. It crumpled, and Moke went over, crashing sideways, his head striking the corner of the desk and then the floor, and Loskutov's boot thudded into the small of his back. Flames were licking up then from his feet into his brain, and there was no Toivo with water to douse them, this wet wasn't water, it had a familiar taste: and when old Anna from a corner of the cell screamed at him to be quiet he said: It isn't me, it's Slota. He's always making a noise. Always. He's mad, it isn't his fault.

Studený said: "It isn't his fault. If the coughing gets on your nerves, think what it's doing to his lungs."

Majerle spat against the wall. He told Studený:

"The man'd be better dead. What do they keep him alive for, when he's crazy? They can't get anything out of *him*." There was no smile in Studený's eyes as he countered:

"And you? What can they get out of you? You who are so kindly to the Englishman and have no more feeling for the Pole than you have for—for the parasha? What'll they get out of you, my friend Majerle?" Majerle returned the older man's steady gaze. He said:

"From me, nothing. They've tried hard as it is, and for what—I could not tell you. I have no idea at all. Are you trying too, old man? Is the habit of questions infectious? Or is it perhaps you and not the Djelt hag who watches and listens from inside?" Studený saw real anger burning in Majerle, and he smiled.

"Forgive me my curiosity. And in turn I forgive you your bad manners." Toivo flung the door open. He stood there, stooped by the burden across his shoulders. They watched in silence as he moved a pace forward into the cell and stopped again, his feet apart. He bent, and lowered one shoulder, so that old Anna slumped down like a heap of dirty washing on to the stones. The bundle of black lay where it fell, and Toivo backed slowly out into the passage. He pulled the door shut behind him, and before it was properly shut Studeny had crossed over and knelt beside the old woman who lay like a corpse in the circle of their frightened faces. Studeny worked silently, with great care, gently straightening the limbs. Nobody spoke or moved until, abruptly, he rose and told Majerle:

"They've killed her. She's alive now, but she won't be in a few hours' time." It wasn't shock, or sympathy, that held them silent. They were used to death, and some of them would have welcomed it, if it could have been brought to them quickly. Not sympathy, but a new fear. It couldn't have been the old woman who was the informer. One of the others in the cell. . . . They drew farther apart, watching each other and racking their brains to remember what they'd said and to whom and how long ago. It wasn't easy to remember every word, even when the words were few. Only Slota was still detached, muttering quietly to himself about the progress at school of his youngest son.

Studeny, his back against the wall again, allowed his gaze to linger on Majerle's broad and hairy face.

Studeny thought: Why, Majerle, I'm right about you, my lad! I saw your anxiety when Slota had a body on his shoulders which could have been the body of an Englishman, and I saw your relief when you knew that it was only Anna Djelt. Studeny thought: Whatever your secret, Majerle, you haven't shared it with the Englishman, not if my guess is right. Majerle turned his head, and seemed unsurprised to find Studeny's eyes on him. He said:

"Funny. I was just saying that maybe it wasn't the old girl who spied on us. Maybe I was right, eh?" Studeny nodded.

"It would appear so. Any of us, it could be. Me—or you, Majerle. Perhaps the Englishman. Or Slota. Even Walzel, there—it would explain their having left him with us for so long, when they have already made known their decision to shoot him: wouldn't it?" Studeny looked at Walzel. "What do you say, my old friend?" Walzel was silent for a minute. Then:

"If I work for them, or if you do, then I'll agree with you that Jan Mazaryk jumped and wasn't pushed. That there's a man in the moon and that Slota's sane." Majerle laughed, and suggested:

"Even that there's a God?" Studeny came in quickly.

"There's a God, all right. If there wasn't, they wouldn't have had to kill Mazaryk. They wouldn't have to do this to us, if there wasn't a God. They'd have it all their own way, if it wasn't for Him." Majerle grunted. He said:

"Fine sort of God, that produces *this*." He held up

his right hand, which wasn't pretty to look at. The fingers had been crushed in the jamb of a door. Loskutov's door. Majerle stared at his fingers, and repeated: "Fine God." Studeny told him:

"When there's infection in a wound, you get pus, which is nature fighting the infection. Now there's a wound in the world, and they upstairs are the infection, the germs in it. The health in the body which fights the infection is the God in the world and in our hearts, and we're the pus which is the sign of resistance." Studeny laughed. "It wouldn't do for a sermon, would it?" Majerle muttered:

"Fine God. Fine lot of pus we are, too." He stared closely at Studeny and laughed. "Not a bad word for it, either."

Moke dozed on a hard chair in an upstairs office. He'd been there since Toivo had cleaned him up and given him a piece of bread to eat and then helped him to this room which he hadn't seen before. It was larger than Loskutov's room, and there was a carpet on the floor, but the desk was the same as Loskutov's and the light was just as hard. Moke dozed, and there was no dream as a dream, but pictures and sounds and the bare rubbing of old wounds, a sense of something new and, therefore, frightening: he dozed with fright in his mind. In the old days, the prefects had been allowed to administer beatings for the smaller offences which the boys committed now and then, and the time set by custom for these chastisements had been at night, in the long dormitories, immedi-



ately after 'Lights Out'. Then, lying in their narrow beds, the boys could hear the prefects' low voices in conference at the end of the dormitory, and a lad who knew that he had infringed some regulation during the day and that the crime might have been observed by a prefect, that boy would lie awake, frightened, or even doze, just as frightened, waiting for the call in the dark. Of course, all that had been changed: Hollowstone moved with the times. But even with the gap of years between, Moke still knew that waiting in the night, the sound of the prefects' feet along the boards and the low murmur of their voices. He knew the sound of his name when they called: "Doncaster! You're wanted!"

"Doncaster!" He waited tensely for the "You're wanted", but it didn't come. Perhaps he'd misheard. Someone else's name, not his. He raised his hand to pull the blankets up over his ears, but there were no blankets, only the call again:

"Doncaster." Not over-loud, or angry. Just his name. Not a prefect, but a man of his own age, sleek and well-fed. A man who wore glasses, the lenses so thick that they altered the size of his eyes when you looked at them. The mouth could have been fashioned with a razor-blade: there were no visible lips, and the slit was so straight that it could have been checked against a ruler.

"Ah. You're awake. I was afraid you weren't going to wake at all—just when I got a chance to talk to you. I've been looking forward to a chat." The man added: "My name's Grauermann." Moke stared

at him, and nodded, and Grauermann waited for him to speak. Moke said, suddenly, quickly:

"I'm an Englishman. You've no right——" He stopped. This one looked better. Mustn't antagonise him. Moke went on: "I mean I want to go back. To England." Grauermann didn't laugh, or yell fury at him. He nodded sympathetically, his eyes behind the glasses small like a pig's, but not hostile.

"Of course. But, unfortunately, you have placed yourself in rather a difficult position. Some of my colleagues believe that you are a spy or a saboteur." Grauermann smiled, stretching the slit wider. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

Doncaster gaped at him. "No, I——"

"Would you like to?" He held out a thick packet of Russian cigarettes. Doncaster swallowed, and shook his head, looking at the packet.

"I never—smoked, thank you, but thank you very——" Grauermann ignored the confusion his offer had brought to the Englishman. He said:

"I'm afraid they've been knocking you about a bit. You must realise that most of the time they're dealing with thick-skinned savages, gangsters from the underworld of Europe. They don't know any other way to treat a man. There isn't much I can do about it, I'm afraid. I can't be everywhere." Grauermann sent smoke pluming at the harsh light. "I'm short staffed, and I have to make do with what rubbish they'll let me have."

Moke thought: Gangsters? Studeny, the surgeon. Walzel, the banker, friend of Mazaryk's. Slota, little

man with a big family. Me. Gangsters? He asked Grauermann:

"What do you want with me?" For a second the little eyes went harder, stones in glass cases. Then Grauermann smiled again.

"I understand. So much questioning. And the other. Well, I will tell you what I want. I want the truth, so that we can end this business and send you home. This is no place for you. I myself believe that you are no spy." He stubbed his cigarette out in the tin ash-tray, leaving the cardboard stub standing up like a miniature chimney, smoking gently on its own. "I want the whole story, Doncaster, every detail." Moke's head was suffering again from the internal hammer which struck a dozen or more times regularly at the temple and then, with shattering pain, once or twice at the back before it resumed its steady, rhythmic punishment of the temple. Moke said:

"There's nothing I can say that I haven't already said. Please don't make me go over it again." At the back it struck its single vicious blow, and he winced, closing his eyes. Grauermann told him, disinterestedly:

"I'm afraid it's necessary." He spread the sheets of Moke's statement, and the yellow pages of Loskutov's translation, over the desk, and peered short-sightedly at them. Then he pushed the pages into an untidy heap on one side. "I've read all that. Now I want to hear your story properly, at first hand."

"Please, I——"

"Doncaster." The voice was soft. "Would you rather I asked you to tell it to me standing on your feet? Would it be easier for you if I took away that chair?" The trap's spring was in sight, eyes like flints and as sharply dangerous. Moke curled his fingers under the edges of the chair's seat, and he answered:

"No! Please, sitting, I'd rather sit. . . ." He closed his eyes. "I had this letter", he told Grauermann. "I had it in the morning, and I couldn't read it until after Chapel because——"

"Stop. Let us start right at the beginning. You must realise that this is an official statement." Grauermann yawned, and shook a new cigarette out of the packet. He shaped the cardboard carefully, pressing it in so that it narrowed to restrict the flow of smoke and so that it would fit his lips. He said: "Now. You were at which school?"

"Hollowstone. It's in Sussex, close to the South Downs."

"And what subjects did you teach at this institution?"

"History, French and English."

"So. For how long had you been doing this?"

"About twenty years."

"I see. You are married, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Children?"

"No." Grauermann smiled, and flipped ash on to the floor. Moke watched him, waiting for the next question, his breathing hard after the talking: his slightly protuberant eyes were fixed on Grauermann,

ready for a new assault, verbal or physical. The Russian said:

“You mentioned something about a letter. Now go on and tell me all about it. You can take all night, if you like. I won’t get tired—I’m a good listener. Go ahead.”

DONCASTER closed the door of the common room behind him, as quietly as he did everything, and walked over to the letter-rack. Not that he expected letters, but sometimes there was a circular, an amendment to the time-table or to the rules, a new list of sports fixtures. There was something there now, a splash of white against the stained oak, and, hoping that it was nothing which could upset his own routine, he pulled the folded sheet of paper out of the slot which was marked by his own name typed on a small, framed card. As he took it, a letter flopped on to the floor. He bent down, not thinking it could be anything for him, but thinking only that he'd dislodged it from someone else's part of the rack. Looking at it, to see in which slot he should replace it, he saw that it was addressed to him and that it bore a foreign stamp. Czechoslovakia—there must be some mistake. And the handwriting was not in any way familiar.

Moke read the note in his other hand. It told him that the headmaster wished to see him before Chapel. Doncaster felt a flutter in his stomach, the same as he'd felt it years ago, when as a small and rather unpopular schoolboy he'd received summonses couched in similar terms. There couldn't be any good in it. He glanced at the electric clock, and realised that he'd need to hurry: stuffing the unopened letter

into his pocket, he walked rapidly out, along into the panelled hallway and up to the study door. By the time he'd raised his hand to knock on the door, the same door which he'd knocked on with the same trepidation so many years ago, he'd quite forgotten the letter, and the pigeon in his stomach was beating its wings so violently that he felt sick.

In those old days, when his knock had reached only halfway up the study door, he'd been frightened each time of the Fives Bat. That was the instrument used, in those days, for instilling discipline into little boys through their tender skins. Now it wasn't any bat, but humiliation which he feared. Doncaster—Old Moke, as he knew they all called him—had never learnt to stand up for himself. He'd never learnt to fight. That was why he'd been on the staff all these years while younger men came and passed him by and moved on to better jobs. (This headmaster had still been learning Latin when Moke had been teaching Greek.) Knowing that he couldn't fight and that they knew he couldn't, Moke lost all his battles before they even started. He was frightened even of his own class, a dozen small boys. Even, sometimes, his own mirror in the mornings—he'd see the rabbit face and the popping, startled eyes, and he'd look away, think of something else while he shaved. He tried to avoid mirrors, tried to forget that scared, unhappy look which put him at other people's mercy.

He knocked on the door, and he heard the headmaster call:

"Come in!" The headmaster was standing with his back turned to the door: his hands behind his back,

he was reading a Bible, which rested on the mantelpiece. He glanced round and, seeing Moke, the interest left his face.

"Oh. Sit down, Doncaster." Moke still stood there, close to the door, and the headmaster pointed at an arm-chair. "Sit down, please." Moke sat down on the edge of the chair.

"About your classes. I dislike interfering in an assistant master's affairs, but really, Doncaster, it can't be tolerated. You *must* exercise some sort of control." Moke looked into the younger man's eyes. It was a thing he'd taught himself to do. He said:

"I know what you mean. I'm afraid that one or two of my class——"

"If boys get out of hand, you should be able to deal with them. You know my rule for insubordination, or rudeness—bring them to me, right away, and no hanging about. There can be no hesitation in such matters—a show of indecision is fatal. In future, please remember that, Doncaster. I shall accept no excuses from now on for any rowdiness from your classes. Do you understand?"

"Quite." Moke nodded, unhappily. "Only——"

"Only nothing. *I will not have it.* You're far too easy going, and the boys take advantage of you. Naturally they would. It's not their fault, if you give them their heads. It's yours." The headmaster picked up the Bible from the mantelpiece. "I'm sure you'll see to it that we don't have to discuss this again." He smiled. "Chapel time." The bell was chiming deeply, the same bell, and they could hear the steady shuffle of boys passing two-abreast, processing



to the Chapel as they did twice a day, the order of the procession never changing, prefects and seniors and juniors, form by form and two-abreast. Doncaster had never been a prefect.

He knew that the other masters would already be in their places at the ends of the higher pews, against the walls of tapestry. Moke turned and hurried back, passed the tail end of the procession, hurried on towards the common room. As soon as he was out of sight of the last two boys, he ran. It was all right for the headmaster to leave things until the last minute: the headmaster kept his gown in his study, and he'd be striding into the Chapel now, swirling the gown around his knees. He was always, by custom, the last in. Moke grabbed his own gown from its hook in the common room, and he ran back again down the passage and across the hall. He took a short cut through the dining-hall, out of a side door into the lobby of the Chapel. The organ was playing softly, waiting for him. He gathered his gown about him and tried not to appear out of breath as he stepped down into the aisle between the opposing seas of curious white faces. Old Moke scuttled down the aisle and took his place behind the choir's rear rank. The morning service began with Thursday's prayer. There was a prayer for each day of the week, and Moke had known them all by heart when he was nine years old.

\* \* \*

Grauermann broke in:

"Has any of this anything to do with the letter?"  
Moke nodded.

"Oh, yes. Yes, it has. I had it in my pocket all the time. I remembered it during the service, but, of course, I couldn't read it then, in Chapel." Grauermann moved heavily in his chair. He asked, wearily:

"Can't we get to the point? This doesn't matter, and I've read it all, here." He jabbed a finger at the pile of papers on his desk. "If you're trying to waste our time, my time, I warn you that I've broken harder cases than you. Don't anger me."

"I'm sorry, but, you see, if I leave any out, like I did with—the last one—he said I was trying to——" Grauermann's eyes burnt out at him from behind their lenses.

"Have they introduced you to the Lastochka, yet? The Swallow?" Moke opened his eyes, and shook his head. He'd been sitting there for quite a few hours, and he'd have welcomed the cell's hard and stinking floor.

"No," he said. "I haven't——"

"You will." Grauermann smiled. "If we don't get to some facts soon. Well now—this letter?"

Moke remembered that, as he climbed the stone stairs with their rounded edges and hollowed faces, he had felt the letter in his pocket and liked the feel of it. At least, here was *something*. It was the same feeling as he'd had years earlier when he was unhappy, as in fact he'd often been, at school, or worried; he'd think: Well, I have that new chess set, or perhaps: After school, there's that book to finish. He'd always found escape in books. His favourite novel then had been Marryat's *Mr Midshipman Easy*. Reading it, he was himself the dashing young officer,

it was he who faced coolly up to his superior officers and out-argued them on points of principle.

Moke sat down in the arm-chair on the raised platform, tore open the envelope carefully so as not to risk spoiling the stamp, and spread the letter out on his slope-topped desk. It was from an old friend, a man named Crutchley whom he'd known at Varsity. Crutchley was writing from the British Information Office in Prague. He wondered if Moke wouldn't like a change of job. They needed an extra man, and Crutchley could fix it for him. Moke remembered then that during the last school holiday, when Jean had persuaded him to take her up to London for a couple of days' shopping and theatre, he'd run into Crutchley in Bruton Street. He hadn't recognised him, at first. Jean was having her hair done, and Moke was strolling along from the place he'd left her in, in Old Bond Street; feeling rather lost, he was heading vaguely for Grosvenor Square, where he'd heard there was a new statue of President Roosevelt. Crutchley had just crossed the road to enter the Gay Nineties, and he'd taken Moke in with him, under a constant fire of one-sided conversation, up to the bar on the first floor. Moke didn't stay long: he was not at ease with Crutchley, or with the others who perched or leant around the bar. They were smart, and had that look of success about them, and Moke felt shabby, silent and absurd among them. He left as soon as Crutchley met someone else that he knew, someone who had more to say and could laugh more easily at Crutchley's jokes. Moke left, and on the way out he avoided the eye of the porter who handed him

his rather shabby bowler. Moke went on his way, uncomfortably, to Grosvenor Square, and since then he hadn't thought of Crutchley. Now, the man was offering him a job. Moke thought: Ridiculous. I'm too old to start rushing about on the Continent. I've got roots here, of course, I can't accept. But it was nice, while the boys came straggling into the classroom and settled noisily behind their desks, to glance now and then at the envelope with its offer. Afterwards in the common room, he'd be able to tell them, casually:

"They've asked me to go to Prague. Some Government job." He couldn't go, of course. All the same, it was good to be asked. Moke thought: I must mention it to the headmaster, let him see this isn't the only job I can get. The class were in their places, quiet for once, and he said:

"Page four eight seven." He glanced round, and saw that the history books were already open at the right place, where they'd ended the last class. He cleared his throat, and ignored a very similar sound, followed by a giggle, from somewhere in the front row of desks.

"They brought the King to Windsor on the twentieth of December. That was as far as we had come, I think, on Tuesday. Now——" Moke saw that he had not the attention of his class. With the headmaster's words in his mind he braved the worst of the lot, a sallow-faced lad at the end of the front row.

"Bromley. In what year is this?"

"In what year is what, sir?"

"Pay attention, please." Moke asked himself, unhappily: Well, what else can I say? What would the headmaster say? He coughed.

"Bromley, if I find you not paying attention again, I shall have to punish you." Bromley stared at his book, smiling slightly, and someone near him giggled into a handkerchief. Moke went on:

"He'd been a prisoner in Hurst Castle since they'd taken him by force from Carisbrooke on the Isle of Wight. In what year was that, Bromley?"

"Sixteen forty-eight, sir."

"That's better." Moke thought, I'm getting control. "Now, while Charles was at Windsor, exactly what went on in Army circles is in some doubt. Reports conflict. That is to say, although——" Moke stopped. He looked down into the classroom, and told them: "This isn't in your text-books. You may take notes if you wish to." He had to wait while desk-lids were raised and slammed, pencils and pens found and borrowed.

"On December the twenty-third, Parliament, that is to say the Rump, appointed a committee to bring the King to what they chose to call justice. But——"

"Wasn't it justice, sir?" This from Bromley. At the back of the room Braid, hot-faced, rose sharply to the bait before Moke even smelt it. Braid shouted:

"Of course it wasn't!—He was the King!"

Moke shouted over the din:

"Be quiet, all of you!" He turned to Bromley. "No, Bromley, I don't think that this could be called justice. Justice is not a science in which dictatorships

excel. But you are entitled to form your own opinions." Moke paused, and continued:

"But at the same time, Cromwell was looking for another way out. Now that it had come to the point of taking the King's life, even he had some qualms and would have preferred a compromise. There are many theories as to his real intentions at that time, but at any rate there is no doubt that he sent the Earl of Denbigh down to Windsor as an intermediary between himself and the King. Denbigh was empowered to offer terms from the Army, which, if the King would accept, his life would be spared." Old Moke stared down at his class with a look of intense inward pride, and he added: "The King refused even to see Denbigh." He saw Bromley's hand shoot up.

"Yes, Bromley?"

"Then Cromwell couldn't very well have done any more to save him, could he, sir?" Moke sat there as though it was his own case which he was arguing. He told Bromley:

"Cromwell had tried to persuade the King to agree to conditions which the King had all along refused to accept, because he felt that he had no right to change the terms of an inheritance which was not his but only his for as long as he lived. It was not his to bargain with. If the King had been the opportunist which Cromwell certainly was, he might have accepted any terms in return for his own life. But he was not prepared to surrender what to him was as much as the liberty of England." Bromley's hand was up again. "Yes?"

"He surrendered Strafford to them, didn't he, sir?"

"Yes, he'd done that, and it was the greatest sorrow of his life. But we've been over that, Bromley, in detail, and we haven't time to go back. . . . No, he wasn't open to any bargain. What he stood for, defended, was so much more. He stood for England and her Crown, for the Crown as the defender of the people's rights. And so there was no question of terms, although his son, the Prince of Wales, begged him to accept any terms which the Army might offer." Moke sniffed, and added: "We'll come to his son in due course.

"On the twenty-seventh it was decreed that the King should be shown no further marks of respect or courtesy: he was to be treated as a common criminal. And on the day after, in Parliament, they set up a court to try him. They called it a High Court of Justice. The Act was passed by twenty-six votes against twenty, and that out of a Parliament elected five hundred strong. . . ." Moke went on telling his class about the preliminaries to this murder, which was planned by a religious maniac using dupes which he used to represent the voice of the people of England. After a time he paused, and said:

"For some reason which I cannot myself understand, there is still controversy over the rights and wrongs of this sordid affair. Perhaps, therefore, I should present the facts to you more openly than—than I can." In the back row, young Jimmy Braid was shaking his head violently. He had all the facts he needed. Moke ignored him. "If anyone is sufficiently

interested, I have a copy of Gardiner's version of the story, which I'm prepared to lend." Braid's hand shot up. "Yes, Braid?"

"Wasn't Gardiner a relation of Cromwell's, sir?" Moke nodded.

"There is a connection. . . . Yes, Bromley?"

"Aren't you a Stuart, sir?"

"You're impertinent, Bromley. Your question is personal and uncalled for. Please keep quiet for the remainder of this hour." Moke didn't notice that Braid was scarlet in the face with fury, halfway to his feet. Bromley asked, brightly:

"Can't I ask questions in class, sir?" Moke opened his mouth to wither him: reminded of his Stuart blood, goaded by the child's insolence, he was near to losing his temper. But Braid was in before him, little Braid who also came from the other side of the Border. He'd rushed around the outside of the block of desks, and now he struck Bromley squarely across his smiling face. Bromley squirmed in his seat, and yelled. Braid shouted at him, and the noise became general. Moke started to his feet, bewildered. He shouted:

"Be quiet, all of you! Braid, go back to your desk at once!" The door swung open, and the headmaster stood there, a shocked expression on his face. The whole class was frozen into silence at the sight of him. Braid, his small face more set than frightened, went quietly back to his desk. The headmaster stepped up on to the dais, and stared coldly at Moke. There was sympathy in his eyes when he glanced down at the silent boys. He turned back to Moke.



"Doncaster. What is the lecture?" Moke told him. The headmaster moved forward to the desk, and didn't look at Moke again.

"Very well. *I* will continue with the lecture. You may leave the class. After lunch, in my study, please." No attempt to speak quietly: the boys listened, wide-eyed with excitement. Bromley was half smiling, and Braid looked close to crying. As Moke walked out of the classroom he heard the headmaster begin his lecture.

"The many attempts made after his death to white-wash the memory of Charles Stuart have little foundation in what we know to be the truth. Attempts to prove——" Moke shut the door behind him, cutting off the loud, familiar voice. He had the letter in his hand as his feet moved down the stairs which he knew so well, and a strange excitement in him said: Why not, and he let it run while he knew all the time that he hadn't the guts to do anything about it. Under his feet the smooth stone whispered: Don't fool yourself, Moke. They'd known him since he was eight years old, and they knew that he hadn't the guts.

Same old bicycle. Others on the staff, some of them much younger men, had cars in which to go home for lunch. Old cars that rattled, but still cars, and for that matter Moke's bicycle was just as old and rattled just as much. He wore metal clips round the turn-ups of his trousers, so that they wouldn't catch in the oily chain, and he rode carefully, ringing his bell quite often.

Moke thought as he pedalled: I ought to be able to control this pressure in me. I'm getting on, now: I oughtn't to get upset so easily. Put it out of my mind, think of something else: this is no way to go home, taking my worry and my nerves to Jean. Though he wouldn't have admitted it even to himself, he thought at the back of his mind: I've been a failure for a long time, and I should be used to the signs of it by now. All the same, he felt the trembling and the pounding too strongly: he had to steady himself before he got home, and when, free-wheeling down the long slope of road, he saw for the many-thousandth time the pub called officially The Pig's Ear and more generally in the neighbourhood Halfway House, he braked and wheeled into its yard before he'd realised what he was up to. If he'd thought about it, he'd have gone straight on home. As it was, he leant his bicycle against the wall of the 'Gents', and walked into the public bar.

I need time to steady up, he thought, time to think it out straight. He bought half a pint of beer, and carried it over to the seat on its own in the corner, away from the zinc-topped bar. There was only one other customer, and he was a friend of the owner. Their jerky, deep-voiced conversation hadn't even stopped while the owner was drawing Moke's beer: a Woodbine waggled damply on the publican's lower lip while he talked, and he only flicked the dropping ash clear of the beer-glass by jerking his head sideways, like a violent wink. Moke sat in his corner and watched them: it was easier than thinking, and more restful.

He hadn't drunk more than an inch of the beer before another customer arrived. A man who walked queerly, lop-sidedly, as though from an old paralysis: he was dressed roughly, as a labourer, and his boots were heavy with mud. Looking at his face, Moke remembered that he'd seen him before, in the village, and that Jean had told him that the man was 'simple': Moke watched with a sympathetic interest as the newcomer shuffled to the bar.

Neither the owner nor his friend even glanced at him. The way they went on talking, not seeing him only a yard away, not looking at him where he waited with his stupid, ingratiating smile, it seemed they might be blind or he a ghost. With a flash of painful knowledge, Moke thought: They aren't going to serve him. Not if he stands there for an hour. But there was a pause in their conversation, then, while the owner at last removed the shredding stub from his lip, and his friend gazed seriously into his pint glass. The labourer waited for a moment, making sure that neither of them was about to speak, and then he said himself, gently, sloppily:

"Mister Harmsworth, if Oi moight trouble ye f'r a glass o' Moild an' Bitter?"

After his question it was very quiet in the bar. Neither of the two showed in any way that they had heard. Moke thought: I was right, they aren't going to serve him. Excitement rose, surging in his head as he thought: If *I* went and ordered it, they'd have to serve *me*: and then I could give it to *him*. But from way back came a ridiculous, terrifying doubt: perhaps they *wouldn't* serve me. Imagining the horror of such

a situation, he looked away, down at his glass, and he heard the owner say clearly to his friend:

"If I were to serve all the 'alf-wits in these parts, I reckon I'd lose all me decent customers, ay?"

Moke's hand shook as he raised the beer to his lips and he slopped it so that some of the beer ran over the edge of the glass at the corners of his mouth and trickled down his chin. He put the glass down quickly, and fumbled for his handkerchief. The owner was saying: "

"'t wouldn't be worth my while, not to 'ave the 'ole ruddy issue clutter'd up wi' loonies." Moke thought: Now! If I don't now, I won't ever be any use! He rose, unsteadily, and pushed the handkerchief down into his pocket. Swathed in his own terror, he moved towards the counter to order a beer for the half-wit. But close to his right elbow, on his way to the bar, the door stood open, and through it he saw his bicycle, propped against the wall which hid the entrance to the 'Gents'. Moke walked out into the yard like a man in a dream. He took hold of the bicycle, his left hand on the handlebars and his right on the saddle, and wheeled it round to face the road. He raised his left foot to the nearside pedal, and he heard a shout behind him.

"Your 'andkerchief, sir. You drop't un in there, sir. Beggin' y' pardon, sir, an' no offence——?" The half-wit stood there smiling cautiously, half expecting a rebuff.

"Thank you." Moke took the handkerchief from the outstretched earthy hand. "Thank you very much." Moke held out a shilling. "Have a glass of

beer on me." He was conscious of the inadequacy of the offer.

"Well, thank y' sir, Oi'm sure. But Oi'll save un f' t'morrer. Oi've 'ad me ration, loike, f' t'day." The man grinned, jerking his head at the open door behind him, indicating to Moke that he was only leaving because he'd had all the beer he wanted. Moke stared at him, thought: Dear God, you've given me wits and you've given him courage. Take my wits and give them to him, or take his courage and let me have it. Neither of us are any good as we are. He sprang on to his bicycle and pedalled quickly out into the road where the slope took charge and swept him down: he hardly needed to pedal again before he was home.

Grauermann, who had been lolling in his chair, occasionally jotting down a word on the margin of the typewritten statement which lay on his desk, but most of the time just lolling with his eyes half shut, at forward and stared keenly at Moke.

"Now," he said. "Now, we have reached a point which interests me." He drew a heavy pencil line slowly across the typescript, and muttered something to himself in Russian. Moke paused for a moment, then asked:

"Shall I go on?" Grauermann stared at him. Moke saw only his eyes, hard points of concentration under the brilliant, bewildering glare from the overhead bulb. Moke was ready to go on with his story, like a gramophone wound and waiting for a hand to set its

needle on the record, or a small dog in a circus waiting for the roll of drums to send it up the silver ladder.

Grauermann gave himself another cigarette, and lit it. It was the last cigarette in the packet, and he crumpled the paper into a ball in his fist. Moke heard it crumpling. His throat was dry and his spine hurt more than his head. Grauermann snapped:

"Stand up." Moke stared at him, bewildered. He didn't understand. He'd have understood "Go on", or "Wait", but he hadn't been expecting "Stand up", and he needed to think about it. Grauermann crashed his fist down hard on the desk.

"Get up!" Moke thought: He wants me to stand up. Up out of this chair. He put his hands on the edges of the seat and pushed, but it didn't move him. Grauermann watched, interested: it took different people in different ways. Moke thought: I can't have forgotten how to stand up; he forced himself forward, out of the chair, on to his feet: he swayed for a moment with the room swirling round him, felt himself falling and saw that Grauermann's desk was coming up to meet him. Slumped across the desk he raised his head and met Grauermann's eyes, a couple of feet away. Grauermann put the cigarette carefully between his thin lips, and using both hands he pushed Moke off the desk on to the floor. Moke's shoulder struck the chair and overturned it: under the desk, through its central arch, he had a close-up of Grauermann's legs. He got up off the floor, crouching on his knees, and waited for the room to steady. He kept his eye on the feet under the desk, ready

to dodge a kick in the face, not realising that even if Grauermann had tried it his boot wouldn't have reached.

"Are you saying your prayers, Doncaster?"

Moke brought up his right knee, and moved his right hand to the edge of the upturned chair. Slowly, taking care not to slip again, he stood up. He had his left side towards Grauermann, and after a pause while Moke stood there uncertainly, staring at the other wall, Grauermann asked:

"Do you know where I am?" Moke nodded. He could see Grauermann, just, out of the corner of his eye. He turned round, his feet shifting an inch at a time, and faced him. Grauermann smiled.

"Well, I suppose that's one way of getting up out of a chair. . . . Oh, don't start that again, *please*." Moke was swaying on his feet. Grauermann told him: "Get back against the wall. Don't fall over the chair. That's right . . . no, not right up against it, or you'll fall asleep. Just clear of it. You can keep your fingers on it, if you like: I don't want you to be uncomfortable." Grauermann leant back in his chair, taking the sheaf of papers in his hands. He flipped over a couple of pages, and began to read. Moke heard the roll of drums and he said:

"I got home and I had the letter——"

"Shut your face." Grauermann looked up angrily from his reading. "Who asked you to start jabbering again?" Moke tried to see him, to see him and to understand, but the light was too bright. It was throbbing up through the veins of his legs and twisting a bayonet in the small of his back, sending streaks

of bright pain up his spine to meet the sandbag in his head.

"I'm sorry, I thought——"

"Think about this instead. This man Crutchley, who sent you the letter. You met him in London, you said?"

"Yes."

"On what date?" Moke thought: Date. Days, and which month.

"I don't know."

"You knew when you told us all this." Grauermann rapped his fingers on the typescript. "Or did you make it up?" Moke said:

"My memory—I don't know. Perhaps I knew then. I don't know."

"Perhaps you don't remember what you said then, what we've got here on paper, and now you don't want to risk contradicting yourself. Is that it?"

"I don't know." It was too complicated to answer. What you remembered and why not. He didn't know. Perhaps he'd known once, but that was a long time ago. A week, or a year: something like that. Grauermann told him:

"You can't remember your own testimony from one day to another, and yet you expect us to believe it. You're a fool. Your Government ought to be more careful in its choice of men. Eh?"

"It wasn't the Government, it was Crutchley. I met him in London, and——"

"Yes. I was coming to that. Crutchley had a free hand in picking his recruits. Doncaster, your story may have satisfied a few stupid schoolmasters and



your wife, all that sort of thing, but I would like you to believe me when I tell you that I am not a fool. I am highly experienced in this business of seeing through flimsy camouflage such as yours." Grauermann leant forward and pointed at Moke's face with his arm extended across the desk. He shouted: "You were hired as a spy! You didn't meet Crutchley in London by accident—you met by appointment! You met by appointment, didn't you?"

"No. I told you. I was coming along——" Moke paused. He looked troubled. "I was coming along the road, and——"

"Name of the road?"

"I—I told you. It's slipped me, for a moment, that's all. I'll remember in a moment."

"And this was on the twenty-third of October, eh?"

"Yes, and he was coming along the other way, he'd just crossed the road, and——"

"The road you don't remember. You knew it an hour ago, but not now. And it wasn't the twenty-third of October, either." Grauermann began to shout again. "First it's the fifth of July and then it's the twenty-third of October! What is it now, the twentieth of September? And where did you meet him—in a public lavatory on the railway station? On Midsummer's Day? Eh? Answer me, damn you!"

Moke felt the wall's surface harsh under the tips of his fingers. It felt like a friend, and he thought: I must hang on to that. The light had hardened into a vast black sphere which was too much to cope with,

altogether overpowering, enough to make a man panic. He said to the voice which struck at him out of the dark:

"I don't know . . . it's what I said. . . ."

"Crutchley arranged it with you, didn't he? You knew that the letter'd be coming, and you deliberately built up the trouble for yourself so that they'd understand you leaving as you did. Crutchley told you how to go about it when you met in the London club by appointment on the day you can't remember. Isn't that true—isn't it? . . . *This* is a pack of filthy lies!" Grauermann flung the wad of typescript across the desk. It flopped on the floor near Moke's feet. Grauermann yelled: "Answer me! Aren't I right?"

Moke couldn't see him. The shouting was part of the stabbings, part of his blindness.

"I don't know. Only what I said." Grauermann said quietly:

Pick up those papers.

Papers?"

"By your feet. Pick them up and give them to me." Moke stooped, obediently, feeling the wall with his hands while he let himself down towards the floor. He asked:

"Where?"

"By your feet." He groped around, patting the boards with the flat of his left hand. "I can't——"

"Stretch out farther. Towards me. Are you blind?"

Yes, he was blind. He stretched out, though, as he'd been told to do, and he had to take the other hand away from the wall. Before he could transfer it

to a new position of support on the floor beside him he slipped forward and couldn't save himself. He struck his head on the upturned chair and slumped across the floor. A splinter ran into his cheek. Grauermann rose from his desk and stumped heavily to the door. He pulled it open and shouted:

"Kapanen! Toivo!" He came back and stared down at Moke. Slowly he drew back his right foot, aiming the toe of his boot for the ribs. Then he shook his head, thoughtfully, and lowered his foot to the floor. He shouted: "Kapanen! Where the devil are you? Toivo!"

They tied him upright in a straight-backed chair in an empty cell and they wrapped a filthy towel around the top of his head. They jammed the loose end of the towel into its own folds so that he looked like a small, bearded touchable in an outside turban. Then they picked up the bucket which Toivo had brought down with him, and they jammed it tightly over his head on the cushioning layer of towel. Kapanen leaned against the wall near the door while Toivo picked up the iron bar and began to beat the bucket with steady, rhythmic ringing blows. He shifted himself slowly around the figure in the chair so that each blow fell in a different place, distributed evenly over the whole surface of the bucket. To Toivo, it was just another job, perhaps rather more pointless than some of the other jobs they gave him. To Kapanen it meant that Grauermann wasn't particular about whether or not the Englishman went

mad before he signed. He had to sign, that was all, and how he was when he did it wouldn't matter in the least. Kapanen leant on the door and picked his teeth while he watched Toivo hammering his way around the bucket.

STUDENY, crouched beside Anna, felt a hand on his shoulder. Toivo had switched the light off from the corridor an hour ago, and it was pitch-black in the cell except just close to the door where a faint radiance greyed the stone floor beneath it and the wide keyhole glared into the cell like a single, malicious eye. Studeny had his fingers on the dying woman's pulse, and his ears were tuned to her faint, irregular breathing. He felt the hand on his shoulder, and resented it. Close to his right ear Majerle whispered hoarsely:

"Is she alive?" Studeny jerked his shoulder forward, away from Majerle's hand. Majerle had no business here with his whispered curiosity: here alone in the dark while the others slept and muttered in their sleep, here alone with the old woman Studeny had been both doctor and priest.

"Go away. Please." Majerle ignored the request.

"If she's dying, we could ask her. She'd tell us, knowing——"

"Go away, Majerle. Leave her in peace." They could hear in the dark the bubbling rustle which was Slota breathing through his mouth while he slept, and Studeny could picture him, on his back on the stones with his straggly soft beard knotted and caked over his collar. Majerle whispered, more loudly:

"Don't you want to know?" There was a threatening edge to the whisper. Studeny said, quietly:

"No. Let her die in peace. Go away." He shifted his fingers slightly on Anna's wrist, trying to ignore the hot breath on his neck.

"You know, and you don't want *us* to know! You want her to die so we'll think the spy's dead and talk while you listen and remember it all to tell to your friends upstairs. That's it, eh?"

"Don't be a fool. For the love of God, Majerle, leave us." Studeny felt the anger rising in him. "Take your filthy prying back to your corner and let it rest." Majerle drew away, and Studeny thought: Thank you, God. Take him away and put him to sleep. But Majerle hadn't gone. His voice, strident and no whisper, sprang up from the dark where Anna's head lay pillowed on a heap of dirty straw. Like a blow out of the dark Majerle's voice burst harshly into the sleeping cell:

"Anna! Were you spying on us? Tell us before you die, was it you?" Studeny felt the leap of the pulse under his fingers and a quick hiss of breath down there on the straw pillow. Then there was no more pulse or breath, and he knew that she had died. But Majerle shouted again in her ear:

"Did you spy on us? Blast you, you old bitch, tell me!" Studeny grabbed Majerle by the hair on the back of his head, and pulled his head back, away from the dead woman. Majerle's hand groped frantically along Studeny's arm, and fastened on his throat, strong fingers biting savagely into the older man's windpipe, but Studeny was mad, crazy with rage: his

left hand swung up and with all the force of his anger his fist crashed into Majerle's face. The Yugoslav fell back, gasping with pain, and in that second Studeny was sane again. He moved quietly sideways, clear of any new assault, and he said:

"Majerle. She's dead. You're shouting at a corpse. Your first shout killed her." Studeny felt weak and sick in the aftermath of his fury and in disgust at what had happened. This was what a man could be brought to: he envied Mazaryk, and his open window: he envied Walzel and Anna. Then he thought: No. No, Jan, you old hypocrite. Not this, after all you've lived, all you've fought and worked and talked for. . . . Only a coward can envy the dead. Out of the dark Majerle asked:

"She is really dead?"

"Really."

"When I shouted——?"

"Yes. When you shouted."

"I—I didn't think——" Studeny thought: No. You didn't *think* when you shouted, and I didn't *think* when I hit you. So between us we killed her before she was ready and we ended up fighting like two jackals over a dead body, because neither of us *thought*. He said to Majerle:

"Don't blame yourself."

\* \* \*

The light flooded suddenly down at them, as shocking as water out of a shower in winter, hard like the feel of ice in it which is only imagined but none the less hard and cold for that, and they heard the

slide of the bolt before the door swung open, showing its 'B' and the '2' beside it. Studeny watched Majerle while the door swung and Toivo stood there with the Englishman, his arm around him, the two of them squeezed together to pass through the door. It could have been a pair of friendly drunks, helping each other home after an evening with the boys. Toivo gave Moke a gentle push, gentle for Toivo: it sent Moke staggering into the cell. He half-ran a few steps, trying stupidly to catch up with his feet, then he met Anna's legs and they tripped him. He crashed forwards across her and hit the floor with his arms crossed over his face. He said clearly:

"I beg your pardon. Truly, I hope——" Studeny thought: They've given him liquor. That's a new one. They've made him tight. Before we know where we are, this place'll be a popular resort with a waiting list. Studeny called:

"Toivo!" The gaoler paused, staring not straight at him but only vaguely in the direction of the voice.

"Toivo. The old woman's dead. Be a good chap, and take her out for us." Toivo looked down at Moke, and sorting things out he saw Anna's body. He nodded.

"Dead, is she?"

"Dead. Won't you take her away?" Toivo nodded again. He could see the point. But he was tired: he'd had a long day.

"Morning," he muttered. "Parasha man can do it in the morning." He moved out, pulling the door shut behind him, and a moment later the blinding



light flicked off leaving space and a thousand small familiar sounds. Studeny called softly:

“Doncaster, Englishman: you all right?” There wasn’t any answer to his question, but they heard the laboured breathing and the drag of his crawling. “How goes it, Englishman?” Still there was no answer to the questions which Studeny was asking for Majerle, knowing that after what had passed Majerle wouldn’t show his anxiety more than he could help. Studeny said to Majerle: “Go and help him. I’ve done my part, tonight. Go and help him, Majerle.”

Doncaster said: “Needn’t. I’m all right. Quite. Find my way, all right.” Out of the dark his voice was sharp and brittle, almost cheerful. He said: “I’ve had a long sleep and a lovely dream and everything’s going to be all right. All the way there and all the way back: most, oh *most*——” they heard the slither and flop, and Studeny moved quickly away from his place against the wall, out into the cell towards where the voice had been, groping for Moke. Studeny and Majerle found him at the same time: they turned him over on to his back and Studeny felt his heart.

“Seems all right.”

“Are you sure?” Studeny smiled at the real anxiety in the other man’s question. A silly question—how could he be sure, after a moment in the dark? He said:

“Smell his breath, Majerle. Your nose is better than mine.” Majerle felt for Moke’s face, and when he found it he bent and sniffed. He told Studeny:

"Cheese. Smell it yourself."

"*Cheese?*" Studeny stooped, and sniffed carefully. Majerle was right, there wasn't any smell but that of cheese.

Later in the night, Moke woke out of his dream. The dream had been rambling, confused: a headmaster talking in Grauermann's voice and Loskutov in the headmaster's gown, ermined, eating cheese noisily right through the morning service. Sitting there in his pew holding a plate instead of a Prayer Book, munching away and not a face turning to watch him. Then it was he, Moke, and while he knew it was impossible, unforgivable, he couldn't stop himself picking his teeth with an E.P.N.S. fork during the reading of the Lesson. They were all watching him, horrified, the headmaster plainly furious and the boys in their pewed ranks nudging each other until there wasn't a pair of eyes that wasn't on him: he tried to pull his hand down to his side but it wouldn't obey him, it stayed up and his mouth stayed open with the fork poking into his teeth. Grauermann stopped reading the Lesson, and shouted across the Chapel "I'm only trying to help you, Doncaster, can't you see the truth?" And, of course, he could see it. It was staring him straight in the face, and he couldn't imagine how it was that he hadn't seen it long ago. It would have saved so much trouble. Crutchley—why, Moke could hear him talking, as clearly as though he was there with him in the cell, and there wasn't a doubt that Grauermann had been absolutely right. . . . Crutchley was hiring him to do some sort

of spy job—listening to the voice, Moke couldn't quite catch on to the details of it, but there it was, loud and plain as life.

"No way out, if you're caught up with. You all on your lonesome, and there's no damn flag ever waved that'll back up a spy when he's slipped." •

Why, of course, there it was, although Moke hadn't noticed before that Crutchley spoke with a Canadian accent. Funny how you notice so many things all at once when they've been under your nose for months. Fancy not noticing that broad, soft accent before! It was so plain and real now that this might be no dream at all: Crutchley might be right beside him there, proving with his words the truth of Grauermann's logic. The voice chuckled—but, of course, it was real, as real as any voice—it chuckled, and said:

"All right, so they nailed me down, but the laugh's on them, Gerry, 'cause they reckon they got a Jug mobster and what they got is *me*, your old pal Harry, no Jug and no mobster, *me*! Don't let 'em know, Gerry, you old bastard, don't make a fuss of it for once so they'll know they got the Canuck after all the lovely filthy jobs I fixed for you—leave it alone, Gerry, and I'll never kiss your wife again, not ever." The voice tailed off, and Moke thought: Crutchley's had a little too much to drink, he's getting confused. Moke could see his face now, rather red, staring at him while he talked into the pink-tinted mirror behind the bar, over the rows of bottles. Anybody could listen who wanted to, he didn't give a hoot who heard what he had to say. Moke thought: Crutchley always

liked an audience, and he put his hand down on the edge of the bar beside him, but it didn't feel right. It felt too cold and hard, too damp. He thought: But of course, it isn't a bar at all, it's the floor of my cell, B2. My cell, and I've been dreaming. He thought: All a dream, and it seemed so real. That was what he was thinking when the voice said, close beside him, still in the soft Canadian drawl:

"The laugh's on them, Gerry, I'm a Jug, see, I never was anything but a mucking Jug."

Moke raised his hand to his face, and he felt the face with his hand and the hand with his face, and he knew that he was awake. He knew, too, that the voice came from Majerle, beside him against the wall. Majerle, the Yugoslav, talking Canadian in his sleep. Moke thought to himself: How? How can this not be a dream? Suddenly he saw it. Fuddled as he was, he saw the answer and recognised the danger in each word. Twisting himself around he found Majerle's shoulder and began to shake it. Majerle said easily:

"Ah, drop it, honey. I need sleep." Moke went on shaking, and Majerle asked him: "Christ Almighty, you been taking pills?" Panicking at the voice, Moke stopped shaking the shoulder. He put his left hand over Majerle's mouth, and whispered into his ear:

"Wake up! You've been talking! Wake up, please, wake up!" Something like a vice clamped on to Moke's wrist: Majerle, awake, kept silent while he held Moke by the one arm: his other hand sought and found Moke's head, ran down identifying the face, hovered at the throat as though undecided as to its next move. Moke tried to free his arm, but there

wasn't a chance. Majerle muttered something in Yugoslav: it sounded like a threat, or abuse. Moke told him quietly:

"You were talking, so I woke you. You were talking English. I thought I'd better——" Majerle jerked suddenly at the arm, pulling Moke right forward against him. Holding him there, Majerle whispered softly but with an edge of menace, right against his ear:

"What did I say? Keep your voice down."

"You talked to someone called Gerry and said the laugh was on them because they didn't know who you were and thought you were someone else. Something about a jug." The fingers of Majerle's left hand caressed Moke's windpipe.

"And what do you reckon's the answer, Doncaster?" Moke swallowed.

"I don't know. It's not my business. I suppose you must be a—an agent, or something."

"And you're going to tell 'em upstairs, eh? Get yourself a good mark?" Terror cleared Moke's brain.

"No—I wouldn't have woken you, would I? I woke you to stop the others hearing."

"Sure you did. But when the boys get working on you next time, what then? What'll you tell the bastards to save your own skin?"

"I won't—I swear it! That's why I woke you up, I wouldn't, I swear it!" Sweat was running down Moke's face and he was shaking with fright.

"Listen, Doncaster. You breathe a word, and I'll kill you. They don't have any ideas about me, not now, and if I smell one after this I'll know."

"I won't, I swear-

"You're fond of swearing, for a schoolteacher. . . . Listen, Doncaster. Don't look at me any different when it's light, don't ever try to talk to me. Forget you heard me talk. Stick close to me at nights so if I do it again you can wake me quick. It'll be worth your while—maybe I'll take you with me, out of this place. One day."

"When? I'll do what you say, I promise, but how can you?" The fingers fell away from Moke's throat, and he asked: "Escape?"

"Let's not ask questions, Doncaster. Do what I said, that's all."

"Oh, yes," agreed Doncaster. "I remember——" Grauermann smiled pleasantly across the desk. He was thinking, this is as easy as picking mushrooms. He told Moke:

"I'm afraid you fell asleep, at the end of our last talk. I didn't realise you were so tired, or I wouldn't have kept you up for so long. Toivo carried you straight down to your quarters. Do you remember anything about it?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. You know, I like Toivo. He hurt poor Walzel rather badly, once, but I think he'd lost his temper and didn't really mean to. You know Mr Grauermann, I've never lost my temper in my life. Sometimes I've felt I ought to, but it doesn't seem to happen." Grauermann nodded understandingly, still smiling. There was something about him that drew a man out. Moke asked: "Walzel wasn't

in the cell, this morning. Has he left?" Grauermann nodded briefly.

"Yes, he's left. Now, Doncaster, this has been a very nice little talk, but we've got work to do. I'd like to get back to your story. . . . We agreed, didn't we, that the man Crutchley hired you in the capacity of an agent, for espionage—without your realising it, of course?"

"Oh, yes. It's pretty obvious, really, now you've pointed it all out. I can't think how I didn't see it myself. All that time! But you know, I've always been rather—gullible—and people have often said——" Grauermann cut him short, waving one hand briefly to stop the chatter.

"Quite. I am having your statement redrafted accordingly. Now, will you carry on from where you left off?" Moke looked worried.

"Certainly, but I don't remember exactly where——"

"You were about to arrive home, after drinking a glass of beer in a roadside hotel." Moke laughed.

"Hardly a hotel! Halfway House, we call it."

"The detail is not of any importance. Shall we continue, now? . . ."

Moke's flat was in an old house called The Lodge. The L-shaped house had been split up to allow for two flats to be let while the owners, the Neethling family, lived in the long part of the L. The two flats were the upper and lower floors of the wing. Moke and his wife lived in the top one, but, as the garden,

like all the surrounding countryside, was steeply sloped, the french window of their sitting-room at the far end of the flat led directly on to the higher part of the lawn. The flat below them, dark as a basement, was occupied by a young man who was employed as a surveyor in the local Town Planning Department. His wife was Egyptian: he'd married her when he was serving in the R.N.V.R., in Alexandria. Nobody ever spoke to her.

Moke met her now, just inside the front door of the house, before he climbed the stairs to the door of his flat. He smiled at her, but she only turned quickly and darted into the door of her own dim apartment. Moke thought: Pity. They don't give the girl a chance, and soon she'll rush off home to Egypt hating everything English. Can't say I'd blame her. Not that it'd make much difference, to have one more Egyptian hate us. They swindled us so thoroughly during the war that they're bound to resent us now.

He tried the door of his flat, but it was locked and he had no key with him, so he knocked to let Jean know that he was there. But there was no sound from inside, and he thought: If Jean's not in I'll have to go around the house and in by the french window. He knocked again, more loudly, in case she hadn't heard, and he heard her call, irritably:

"All right, Jim! Can't you wait half-a-minute?" He didn't answer, not wanting the people in the rest of the house to hear. Jean jerked the door open and told him:

"I was rinsing my hair." She had a face-towel



wrapped round her head, and she left him in the open door and hurried back in to the running tap. He walked down the passage, into the sitting-room, and out on to the lawn: looking down to his right, across the garden and down into the dip, over the tops of the trees where they fell away with the falling hillside, he could see the roofs of the cottages and the church's stiff straight spire. Across on the other side of the valley the hills rose again, crouched one upon the other, resting on England's softness. He thought: I wonder how many people see it as I do, as something that makes up for everything else that's wrong? But his peace was broken by the sight of the Honourable Penelope Neethling, coming swiftly up from the end of the garden with a pair of hedge-clippers in her gloved hands: she was a good-looking girl, and when she wasn't in the country she was in the London papers. Moke didn't bother to ask himself why he was always scared of her. He turned away, back into the sitting-room and hid himself in a chair in the corner. He sat still in the chair until he'd heard her pass the window, humming cheerfully and clashing the clippers. Then he pulled Crutchley's letter out of his pocket and started to read it all over again. He was reading it when Jean came in from the bathroom.

"Letter?" He glanced up, for some reason embarrassed, rather as though she'd caught him reading a dirty book.

"It's from old Crutchley."

"Who on earth's Old Crutchley? Have I met him?"

"Oh. Perhaps not. . . . He—it's to ask me if I'll take a job. A Government appointment, in Prague." She gazed at him as though she thought he was pulling her leg.

"You're joking."

"No, really. Look for yourself." He stood up, and handed her the letter. She read it quickly, then flopped into the chair he'd left and stared up at him as though she still didn't believe it.

"But this is ridiculous, Jim. Why should he ask *you*?" He couldn't help feeling rather slighted by her surprise. She said: "And Prague—that's on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is." She laughed.

"Of course, you aren't thinking of it, are you?" It wasn't a question, it was an assumption. He frowned.

"I'm not sure how to think about it. Things aren't too good at school these days, what with one thing and another, and——"

"But you couldn't leave, not after all these years." He shook his head.

"I suppose you're right: I couldn't. But I rather liked the idea, at first—as an idea, only—and to be asked . . ." She jumped up out of the chair and kissed him lightly on his forehead.

"Of course. Darling—you poor old sausage! I'll only be a moment: I promised to ring Cynthia, about tennis. Lunch is all ready, and I won't be long." He watched her hurry away to the telephone at the end of the passage, and he thought: That's just about right, poor old sausage, and nothing much more than that. He heard Jean on the telephone, talking to

Cynthia. He heard the words: Job, Government, Prague.

"Yes, my dear, Prague, of all places! Just imagine poor old Jim behind the Iron thing!" Jean laughed, delighted at her own imaginative efforts, and Moke went quickly out into the garden. He thought, Well, and he looked over at the hills which were his friends because he'd made them so over many years, he thought: Well, so it's a joke, someone taking me seriously. It's such a very good joke that they can't see it themselves yet, and even I didn't know it till this minute. But those hills knew, all right, that was what they'd been smiling about. Now I know it too, suddenly, just like that, someone else's words and laughter over the telephone and there's no other answer. I'll have to go now. He heard Jean clink the 'phone down in its rest, and he turned into the house to tell her the rest of the joke.

Moke told Grauermann: "Odd, I suppose, but that's what really made me go. Hearing my wife sniggering on the telephone. She was sort of dismissing me . . . that's why I went. When I think about it, a man like me, who never had much time—opportunity, I suppose—for all this woman business, even a man like me, a woman's laugh can send me off to a thing like this. It's silly, isn't it?" Grauermann was staring at him, and Moke saw that the friendly interest was gone from his face.

"You're becoming confused again, Doncaster.

Take a hold on yourself. You've already told me that your departure was planned months earlier, when you met Crutchley—by appointment—in London. Now you're trying to tell me that it was only on the spur of the moment, because of some imagined slight, that you decided to go. Don't be a fool, Doncaster—make up your mind which story you're going to tell." Not eyes now, but hard, shiny pebbles behind the thick lenses. Not a<sup>1</sup> mouth, but a slit like the biting jaws of a sprung trap. Moke groped back into his frightened mind, searching for what he'd said before and how it could be different from what he was saying now. But in his mind he couldn't find much that helped: fogs drifted there, and the scenery changed too quickly, walls came up to obscure what had been a clear and uninterrupted view of—what? What could he have said yesterday?

"I'm telling you the truth, really I am."

"You deny now what yesterday you admitted freely?" Grauermann sat quickly forward, and the blood rushed dark into his face with the growing anger. His fists were clenched, pressing their white knuckles down on the desk, there under Moke's nose. "Your statement has been taken down word for word as you made it. You can't change that, you lying fascist spy!" Moke recoiled.

"No. I'm not a spy, I never was. I tell you——" Moke tried to look away from Grauermann's eyes, but he couldn't. He sat there petrified, like a rabbit facing a stoat. It was Grauermann who glanced away, to study his watch.

"I haven't any more time to waste on you, not

today. But you'd better sort it out before we meet again, Doncaster, in the morning. For your own sake . . ." The Russian's voice quietened, and the eyes lost some of their sharpness. He said: "We've been getting along very nicely, Doncaster, with this business. I don't like to have to hurt people, knock them about and so on, you understand, and it's been nice to find someone who can respond to reasonable treatment, get along quietly like this without any trouble. The other's such a waste of time, Doncaster, because we always get where we're going in the end—why not right away, and no fuss?" Doncaster saw it coming, the new outburst, heard the catch in Grauermann's voice like a car changing gear before a hill, only it was the prelude to more screaming after the quiet, easy tone of the last minute. Grauermann yelled:

"But if I have any trouble from you tomorrow, I'll see you regret it! I'll have you torn apart, you filthy capitalist trash! I'll make you regret the day your worthless whore of a mother spawned you, the muck you are, into a London gutter!" Suddenly Grauermann relaxed in his chair: the fit had passed. He drew the back of his right hand slowly across his forehead, as though he was exhausted by strenuous exercise. Then he stood up, pushing back the chair, and came around the side of the desk. He stared down at Moke, breathing heavily. The spasm of rage had left him weak: sweat glistened on his nose, and his hands twitched where they hung at his sides. He told Moke:

"Be wise. Take my advice, Doncaster, and be sensible. Don't make it hard for us. You know,

Doncaster, you don't know what pain is. Not yet." Grauermann bent, and took hold of Moke's shoulder. Their faces were only six inches apart. "Well, tell me: are you going to be wise? Or do we have to introduce you to the Swallow, tomorrow? Eh?" Moke opened his mouth to reply, but before he could speak Grauermann spat heavily, straight into his open mouth. Grauermann turned away to the door. He chuckled, and said: "*That's* what I think of your lies!" Moke retched. He struggled frantically to control the nausea, but he couldn't stop the savage relentless pumping of his stomach. He retched again and again, thinly and painfully, on to the floor between his knees. Wildly his mind stretched out, groping away from this present horror and seeking some straw of comfort or of hope, and for once it was there within reach. Majerle. On that rock of possibilities his taut nerves eased, and his stomach rested, so that when Toivo came in to fetch him he found a limp, sweat-damp figure lolling with only helpless acceptance and certainly no hope showing in its dim encrusted eyes.

THE cell door closed behind him, and Moke stood still under their questioning eyes. There were fewer eyes now: Walzel was gone, and Anna had died. Moke asked Studeny:

"I meant to ask this morning. Where's Walzel gone?" Studeny looked surprised at the question. Majerle asked, not looking at Moke: "What's he say?"

"He asked where Walzel had gone. . . ." Raising his voice, Studeny answered Moke: "They took him away yesterday, and shot him. They took my old friend out like a mad dog and shot him, about an hour before you came in stinking of cheese." Moke picked his way across the cell and sat down in his usual place between Studeny and Majerle.

"Are you sure?" Grauermann had only said something about Walzel going away. Moke had understood it to mean that he had been let out. He asked Studeny: "Are you certain?" Majerle growled to himself in his own language, gruffly, impatiently, but Studeny answered:

"We heard the shots. A volley of—well, maybe five—close together but ragged, and half a minute later another shot, on its own. . . . Only shots, but they can tell a story plainly enough."

Moke couldn't take it in. He lived so much among

the gentle cushions of his own imagination that the facts of this soviet prison-life remained shocking as they came one by one to his startled notice. It didn't seem possible, that quiet old man . . . He asked Studeny:

•“You talk about it so—detachedly. *I* couldn't, and Walzel was *your* friend. *You* take it for granted. They could take me out now and shoot me, and all you'd say would be: Well that's Doncaster they've shot today.” He leant forward, resting his face in his hands, and he muttered: “Is this true or am I mad?” Majerle asked for a translation, and Studeny patiently obliged him. Majerle growled:

“A good actor, the Englishman, eh? . . . Ask him what he's been doing upstairs, ask your friend that. Why they let him off so early without doing any damage to him. Eh? Ask him why they feed him cheese like he was some sort of household pet!”

Studeny shrugged his shoulders, and told Moke: “This Majerle here, he thinks you're a spy. An informer. He sees that you are not hurt and that you have returned early to the cell, and he wants to know why. He recalls that last night you returned with a smell of cheese about you, and for that also he seeks an explanation. Do you wish me to tell him anything in answer to his quite absurd deductions?” Studeny waited, smiling, for instructions, but Moke stared in horror at Majerle. Up there, and down here, it was the same, accusation and suspicion. Here there had been a certain peace, a resting place, a comradeship in suffering and fear. Now it was like home had become after school, one set of worries there and



another here when he needed peace to set himself ready for the first. His head swam with the shock, and from a distance he heard Studeny's light-hearted comment:

"My friend Majerle has a phobia about spies. He even tried to question the old woman, after she was dead. He's a bit potty about it—I wouldn't let it worry you." Studeny changed his language, and said to Majerle: "Look at him, you idiot. That isn't acting—he's shocked right out of his senses. He can't even hear what I'm saying. Look at him! You might as well go over there—" Studeny waved towards the other end of the cell—"Go over there, and call the parasha a spy." Moke looked up at Majerle, and spoke to him in English:

"Upstairs they tell me I'm a spy and now you tell me the same thing. You're wrong, I tell you, as wrong as they are! I never spied on anyone in my life. I'm an Englishman, a schoolmaster, I'm fifty years of age and I tell you I have never spied." The words were familiar, as though he'd used them before, but he couldn't remember where or when. "Can't you see—" Majerle raised his shaggy eyebrows, and asked Studeny as though it didn't really matter:

"What language is that? Is he talking to me?" They heard Toivo working at the bolt on the cell door, and Majerle said loudly: "Lunch. Special two-course lunch. Bad bread and a little dirty water. No cheese for us, we don't know the right people." Toivo stared across at their end of the cell. He raised one hand and beckoned, but they couldn't tell for whom the gesture was intended. Toivo piped: "Majerle.

Majerle is wanted." The Yugoslav rose to his feet like a bear coming out of a bush. For a moment he stared down at the Englishman, and then he asked Studeny: "Wasn't I right?" He started across the cell, then stopped and added over his shoulder: "Finished with him and they send for me. Eh?" He moved slowly across the cell, his heavy head low on his bull neck, and when he reached Toivo he laid a hand affectionately on his shoulder. "All right," he said. "All right, Toivo, my old comrade. But next time let me have my lunch first, eh?"

Mokey dragged his eyes off the door as it swung shut behind Toivo, and turning he met Studeny's deep-set gaze: puzzled, and perhaps amused at the puzzle. He asked Mokey:

"What's it all about? One day he's nursing you like a sick baby, and the next thing we hear is that he thinks you're a paid spy from upstairs. Do you understand it, my little Englishman?"

"No. No, I don't understand anything. I don't even know why I'm here or what they want of me. Maybe I'm mad or dreaming, but I can't tell. Only one thing I know, that I can't stand much more of it, not much more." He stared almost pleadingly at Studeny, as though he expected or hoped for comfort. But still he found only the amused, tolerant interest.

"That's a silly thing to say. If you'll excuse my being rather frank. But until you've had to stand it, you don't know what you *can* stand. You don't know much about anything until you've seen it and lived it. Bad things start—oh, bad, but not all that bad—and by degrees they change, get worse, go from stage

to stage, but the stages are small in themselves so that you accustom yourself to them as they come, not appreciating the total. You're close to what's happening and coping with it, so that you never have the time or the opportunity to pause and say, No, I can't stand *this*, or I can't face *that*. It comes and you meet it. But afterwards, when it's all over, looking back on it and seeing it as a whole from a distance, then a man thinks, I couldn't go through it again. Looking back on it, it can frighten him out of his wits to think about it, and if he sees the first stages growing new all over again, the first step of a repetition of the whole which having known before he has a right to fear, if he sees it coming again like a dark, deep, cloud of known horror, well, that's when he can say *I can't face it*. I give it to you as a theory, not unfounded in my own experience, that these are the circumstances of a large proportion of suicides." Studeny eased himself on his bed of stone, and he told Moke: "You, Doncaster, have never before experienced anything like this, and, therefore, I tell you that you have no right to say that you have a limit to your endurance of it. You don't know. Now I, on the other hand, spent three years two months and eleven days as a guest of the Gestapo, which was much the same as this. Similar systems adopt similar methods. I have done this before and I tell you that I, no stronger than most men, can do it again. Not without fear, not without the occasional smell of despair. But I can do it. And so can you."

Moke muttered: "You don't understand. I couldn't bear any of this, at first. Then lately I came to find a

sort of peace here in the cell. A refuge where I felt—not alone. Now Majerle here is the same as the ones upstairs. There's no peace. There isn't anything!" Moke leant sideways and clamped his hand on to Studeny's arm. The old Czech stared at his feet, listening. He left his arm still under Moke's grasp. Moke gabbled shrilly: "Majerle'd kill me, if he can . . . I can't—all right, I've led an easy life, in a way, I haven't met anything like this before. But I don't think I can face it, not up there and down here and no peace in any place. I'd rather they—I'd rather——" Studeny frowned at him, and Moke added, humbly: "I've been a coward all my life."

"You're talking like a baby. Churchill would be ashamed of you . . ." He spoke as though he were, indeed, admonishing a very small child. . . . He said, staring at his boots: "A man who despairs quickly is a man who has never known the reality of despair, the—the faceless and formless empty torture of the darkness in a lighted room, the mind's frantic groping for the light which shines on the face but not into the soul, because the soul is numbed and walled about with the shock of hope's withdrawal. To know true and utter hopelessness, the mind struggling as a fly struggles in a schoolboy's relentless fingers . . . to open the drawer slowly and take the pistol in the palm of your hand, and look at it and know it but see it with new eyes, and think, No, and lower your hand to the drawer but think again, Why, if I'd use you to kill others, why not to kill myself? Am I afraid for the pain or my life, for what I would give to or take from another? But again a new thought

when the round clicks into the breech: Would this be an answer? Can the problems of life be solved with a bullet made by a fool in a factory? And later to cry, a grown man alone with only his sorrow to make him cry, and the pistol back in its drawer unused, unusable except on others who, having no grief, would have no wish to die. . . . Look into my eyes, Doncaster. Closely." Moke peered into the depths of the old man's eyes, but all that he could see where he looked for the signs of suffering was understanding, gleaming deep and powerful as though many lives and deaths and the knowledge which lay between those beginnings and endings were all rooted in the eyes themselves. The old man drew away.

"Believe me. It is nonsense for you or anyone to say: This is too much . . . By the way, I'll give you a tip, Englishman. It's a thing I thought up myself and which I have found a great help. When you are up there, and it goes badly so that you feel sorry for yourself, look hard at the man—Loskutov or Kapanen or Grauermann, whichever it is—look at him, and think to yourself: Some poor woman has to share a bed with that creature! Then you will pity the woman, if you have any unselfish feelings in you, you will pity her so hard that you will have no pity left for yourself." Studeny chuckled. He said: "It never fails, with me."

Slota, who had seemed to be asleep, close to the far wall, staggered to his feet. Both of them watched him as he crossed unsteadily to the door: the noise that had been his usual low muttering grew louder, and suddenly shouting at the top of his voice he

flung himself at the door. Moke knew nothing of the meaning of the words, he only saw Slota tearing with his fingers at the door's edges, only heard the anguish in the voice which was close to the howl of a mad dog. Studeny caught his breath, and hurried over, an old man's hurry, fussy stumbling, his feet betraying his strength: he put a hand on Slota's shoulder, and Slota whirled to face him, gibbering Polish, pointing always upwards at the ceiling. He wrenched himself free of Studeny, beat on the door with his fists, hard, as though he had no feeling in them or as though he had forgotten that pain mattered. The old man argued gently into the Pole's left ear, but he whirled around, slashing with hooked fingers, and Studeny sprang back or he would have lost his eyes. Slota put his mouth down, close against the wide keyhole, and screamed like——Moke thought: Like a pig having its throat cut. Studeny shook his head, hopelessly, and turned back to Moke. Moke asked him, shouting to make himself heard:

“What is it? What's the matter with him?” Studeny shrugged.

“He's mad, that's all. Nothing new. Cracked.”

“What's he shouting?” Studeny paused warily before he answered. These things happened: they came and existed and you had them with you, but you didn't have to talk about them. He told Moke:

“He thinks his wife is up there. He thinks they're beating her, and he wants them to let her go and torture him instead. . . . He's crazy, that's all.”

“Can't we do anything? They'll hear and——” It seemed that they had already heard. The door

swung inwards, sent Slota staggering backwards into the cell. Toivo flung Majerle sideways on to the stones, sprawling, falling heavy but with his arms under his face, instinct if nothing else alive. Majerle lay still, but Slota screaming his desperation flung himself at the half-opening in the doorway, seeking to pass Toivo, ignoring Toivo. Toivo swung his fist: it caught Slota above the right ear, crashed him against the door's solid edge. He slumped down along the line of the door and toppled sideways across Toivo's feet, and Toivo drew back one boot, the right one, kicked Slota hard and accurately in the kidneys. Nobody interfered, because nobody wanted the attention transferred to themselves.

Toivo growled: "Yelling and bawling, bloody lunatic, that's what——" and he kicked Slota again, in exactly the same place. Bending, he grabbed him like a heap of dirty washing and flung him clear of the door. He backed out, still muttering angrily to himself, "Lun'tics don't b'long in prisons, no place for such as them, b'long in 'sylums, that's what, I ought to tell 'em." Studeny waited until he heard the bolt rasp over before he hurried across to the unconscious Pole.

Majerle raised himself on to his elbows, and stared at Moke. His face was streaked with blood from a broad gash on his forehead. He called: "Studeny! where are you?" Without looking up from his work, Studeny told him:

"Here. Busy. . . . Was it bad?"

"Not too bad. Not bad enough for what they wanted. Swine that they are. Filthy, creeping, bastards that they are."

"Good." Studeny, peering down into Slota's lifeless face, smiled with pleasure. "Fine. Tell me—what *do* they want of an honest man like you?" Majerle shifted all his weight on to one elbow, and used the free hand to clear his eyes of drying blood.

c. "Names. People I'm supposed to know. That's all, so far." Studeny nodded over his work. "So. Anti-Reds? 'Fascists'?"

"God, no. I've never moved in political circles, like you. Black-márketeers. Chaps like me. The small-time boys." Majerle's shoulders shook with silent laughter. "I'm not one of your big-wigs. I'm a foreign spiv, that's all. I was peddling stuff that I'd brought in with me, and I'd had a couple more than I should've had and they caught me in a bar in the Old Town. Nice little spot. They didn't get anyone but me, and so they want the names of the others. Fine friends to get a chap drunk and then leave him, eh? If I knew the bastards' names I'd give them gladly. I wouldn't stand all this for the sake of that bunch of trash." Majerle stared at Moke's blank staring eyes. He thought: Those eyes ought to have been pushed in a bit, at birth. If he got really scared, they might fall clean out, like a Peke's. Majerle grinned. "Studeny. Tell the Englishman what I said. About me being a spiv—there must be a word for it in French, eh?"

Obediently, Studeny translated for Moke, and Majerle—Majerle?—the Yugoslav watched with amusement plain in his face while he saw the equally plain disappointment in the Englishman's. It was funny, all right! The little fellow looked like he might



burst into tears at any minute! Harry Trotter—he went by the name of Majerle—Trotter thought: He’s saying good-bye to the dirty old guardian angel he found in the night, the one with the corny accent: he’s cut up because he reckoned he could leave his problems to a real, live *agent*, a sort of Humphrey Bogart going by the name of Majerle, and now all he can see is a spiv that’s been leading him along and can’t save his life for him after all. Poor bloody little Limey, believes every damn thing he’s told: tonight I’ll tell him I’m Joan of Arc, and maybe he’ll kiss my hand. But I need him, if I talk, I need the little man around. Trotter thought: He can’t have been bluffing, can he? He can’t have pretended to me that he heard me gas about Gerry and the rest of it? If he was bluffing, I sure bought it, I gave him what he wanted, all hundred per cent, like a blind baby in its cups I took the bait and swallowed the hook. But if it’d been that way I’d have known about it by now, they’d have put it to me that way upstairs, they’d have dropped the black market charge by now and come out with the real stuff. No, he wasn’t bluffing: I’ll have to trust him, and come to think of it it’s as well he’s around, if I make a habit of this talking in my sleep.

But there was another puzzle. Trotter couldn’t get the hang of why the Czech police, the SNB, had turned him over to these Moscow boys when they still didn’t know that he was anything but a spiv. It should have stayed with the SNB, a case like his, and in due course they’d have sentenced him to ten years in one of the new forced labour camps, and before he’d

been there a month, well, being the way he was, he'd have got out. But somewhere along the line something had slipped, and instead of being in the hands of the SNB, amateurs, here he was being pushed around by the top-notchers from Omsk and Tomsk. Not that there was really anything in it to make jokes of, not even weak jokes—this fellow Grauermann, now, he was just about famous. They had all heard of Grauermann, way back. Not that there was anything much in the man that there wasn't in the others: they all came out of the same mould out of the same machine, and one was as bad as another. Only when one of them had been at it a long time without getting short change himself, his own medicine, well, the name got around and came out in class. Gerry's classes: he called them briefings.

Well, one minute he was there with the boys (didn't know their names, and didn't want to) in Goczan's rasty little bar in the Old Town, and the next minute the boys were moving for the backstairs and the place was empty as dammit except for him and Goczan and the police whistles from the street. Goczan yelled at him to hide in the store-room, back of the bar: the police'd be at the back too, Goczan yelled, and the others'll be in the bag, they should have stayed put and not bolted like rabbits, get in there and keep quiet. So he got in there and kept quiet, surrounded by the reek of bad wine and raw spirit, and not a minute passed before the SNB lieutenant and his half-dozen troopers hauled him out, back into the taproom, where they stood him against the wall and knocked him about a bit for the

fun of it. The others were clean away, that included Goczan: so much for him and the friends of the underworld who were supposed to be the right sort of friends for a man like him to have. Friends, thought Trotter, some lovely friends I found for myself, and the lieutenant smacked him hard across the mouth before he asked:

"Who are you? What is your business here? Answer!"

"Majerle. Steven Majerle, manufacturer's representative. I have papers——" He reached to his inside pocket, but the lieutenant cracked the butt of his gun down across his wrist, and he forgot about the papers. "I came here to meet a business connection, and then there's a lot of noise and they shove me in there"—Trotter jerked his head towards the back of the bar, the storeroom—"And I hear everyone rushing about yelling like the place is on fire, then you bust in and start knocking me about. Look, Lieutenant, I don't know what this is about, I tell you, I'm a Yugoslav citizen and——"

"What are you selling?"

Well, the blind was guns. Lot of people called it dangerous, but Trotter liked it because it took a man straight into the right sort of crowd. Always had before, anyway. The sort of crowd who made useful contacts here and there for a man who wasn't really a spiv at all. It led to interesting friendships. And if it was dangerous in some ways, others made up for it: if you got yourself caught with a pistol in your pocket, well, so long as it was clean in the bore and looked like it hadn't been used, and then you could

show 'em a dozen more in cardboard boxes in your grip, well, that was what you had the thing for, eh? To sell. Nothing unpleasant, only a racket.

Automatic pistols, made in Jugoslavia. Seventy-sixes, blue-black and brand new.

“Look, Lieutenant, these sell easy at three thousand crowns a throw. Take a couple and let me go, eh? Two for you and one each for your men, eh? That's a lot of crowns, Captain. Nobody'll know where you got them. It'll ruin me, sure, but all right, take them. They're a lot better than the rubbish you turn out here, all that BRNO stuff. Look, Lieutenant, take the lot, eh? I won't say a word, I swear it. They were only samples—you take the lot, and I'll be off home to Belgrade and I promise you I won't be back in your lifetime. I learnt my lesson, Lieutenant, I'm not fooling.” Talk like a frightened spiv, my boy, act the part. They'll take you along, all right and lock you up, that and a bit else, but that's the easy side of this bargain: the big thing is that they have to know you're a small-time spiv and nothing else, not a—well, what's in a word?

\* \* \*

So now he'd never meet up with Pierre. That was what he'd been hanging around in Prague for, all this time, each day more dangerous than the last, waiting for the ugly, thin-faced Frenchman who should have been there waiting for him ten or twelve days earlier. Maybe Pierre had got caught up in some silly damn thing like this one: maybe he was dead. Gerry'd probably know all about it. Gerry'd be there briefing

someone else to go and clear it up, fetch the goods from wherever they were. Whatever might have happened to Pierre, he'd have left the goods in safety, where Gerry could reach them. Even Pierre's four mistresses took second place when Gerry needed a job done, and when he needed it done really well. Trotter thought without jealousy, it was Pierre La Housse who got the brief. Trotter thought: I always came in on the follow-up, I was always the first reserve. He loved Pierre, with the rough admiration which a man as large and tough as he could feel for a man much slighter and much harder. Talking with the Frenchman, drinking with him, he'd always felt like lead consorting with Toledo steel.

Trotter had been waiting around in Prague for Pierre to show up and pass him the goods. Easy to pass, a roll of lavatory paper: do it in a public convenience, one in after the other and the roll swapped and nobody knowing the difference. Only in this roll a couple of sheets which were just about the centre sheets of the thing (Extra Fine and Soft, Gold Medals for Hygiene and every Antiseptic Property—printed on the wrapper in three languages) a couple of sheets of this superb material were covered with very small writing, figures, facts. What they were about, these facts and figures, wasn't any concern of Pierre's or Trotter's. They wanted it, that was all, Gerry wanted it, and Gerry could do the work once he had it. As far as Pierre was concerned, he had to pass it on to Trotter, and as for Trotter, well, it was his job to bring it back to Gerry. Then it was Gerry's business, but that was routine, red tabs and brass hats

and confidential chats between V.I.P.s: something would be started, or stopped, or saved, and whatever it was it'd be on account of what Pierre La Housse had passed to Harry Trotter in a public lavatory, a couple of sheets of bumf.

- Trotter thought: That was the way it should have been, but the way it's turned out is this: I'm in gaol, maybe for keeps, and Pierre, well, maybe God knows where Pierre is, Pierre and his roll of sanitary paper.

SHE was only an impression, there in the corner of his eye while Moke sat reading a week-old airmail *Daily Telegraph*. He was reading an article about the future of the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth: apparently there'd been a commission, and a report, and suggestions, and apparently the sailors and the educationalists had widely divergent views on the subject of how Naval Officers of the future should be inducted. Moke had thought, reading the article for the first time: I suppose I'm an educationalist, if I can be classified at all: I certainly know nothing about sailing, except that they shot Byng to encourage the others. As a schoolmaster I suppose I ought to side with the civilian commissioners, but I can't help feeling that the Navy's been managing pretty well without their assistance for some time. It hasn't let us down yet, that I know of. Perhaps the Naval Officer of the future will be required to wear thick glasses and talk bad English and know everything about social science, but I don't see that it'll improve on Trafalgar or win a new Matapan.

That was what Moke was thinking while he read the article through for the first time. He went through it again, and in the corner of his eye she was still there and he wasn't thinking about educational systems. The words and phrases slipped by, familiar, understood,

and there she was and he hadn't the courage to look straight at her. He didn't think about it, he didn't consciously think, I want to look at her and I daren't. It was a matter of habit and inhibition. It was the Victorians putting trousers on the pegs of pianos.

. It had all started when he got married. As a young married man he'd deliberately averted his eyes, imagining that Jean would be hurt if he didn't. He was married, and deeply aware of his promises at the altar, aware and frightened of their implication. He had taken out a limited licence, and he hated trouble and guilt: the lines were drawn for him as plain as they were white-washed on to the football fields, and he stayed on-side quietly behind his blinkers, timorous and shy of the referee's whistle. And there was more to it than that! When a man was—well, not exactly virile, not self-assertive or physically attractive—when a man was that way, and knew it, and when he was a schoolmaster without a future and with a wife stronger than himself, well, he was asking to be laughed at if he took an interest in other women. A man like Moke was laughed at more than enough, without inviting more.

Oh, there'd been trying incidents. One or two temporary matrons at the school, and some of the younger mothers. Made him blush to look at them: at least, he'd often felt as though he was blushing. Couldn't help it: couldn't help *thinking*! Made him angry, sometimes, showing too much of themselves, wanting it looked at: a look where they wanted it, and he saw them laughing behind their eyes, laughing at his looking and wanting and not even daring



to look more than once. Not standing a chance. Like showing champagne to a monkey. It made him angry, and he thought viciously: Why show it? You've all got it, all got two of them, and when they're strapped up that way they all look the same! He thought: You've nothing to be proud of, and he blushed, and when he was alone he got angry all by himself, timid and anxious in the common room, the same way (though he didn't, of course, link the phenomena in his own mind) as a bull elephant gets angry when he wants a cow.

And now, there she was in the corner of his eye.

When he'd left England, a month ago, he'd done so for a number of reasons, and none of them had anything to do with women, except that it had been Jean laughing at the idea of his going that'd finally brought him to the decision. But there'd been a feeling, a strange feeling, almost like a fresh scent of youth or the return of forgotten freedom, an exciting, rather frightening sensation, a thought or two but more sensation than thought. In the trains, and on the boat, he'd even glanced at one or two women. Looked away again quickly, of course, but with his embarrassment there'd been that strange excitement, almost a shadow of the adolescent's sudden realisation of his personal sexual freedom. Ridiculous, he thought. Ridiculous, at my age, in my position! Making a fool of myself!

Moke glanced down at the paper, putting his hands up on either side of his face so that there was nothing there any more in the corner of his eye, and he read:

"It has been suggested that the College should

cease to function as a Naval Academy, and should be run on the lines of a Secondary School but with serving Naval Officers as advisers on the staff. There should be no obligation on a boy to enter the Navy at the end of his course . . . ”

Mokey stared at the paper, and he thought: I don't know much about it, but someone's surely gone rather off the rails, there. Either it's a Secondary School or it isn't, and does a boy *have* to go through a Secondary School before he can get a naval education? And how many Naval Officers would like the job of adviser on the staff of it? He lowered his right hand to hold down the edge of the paper, which was flapping in the draught from the reading room's open window, and there she was, still in the corner of his eye. From what he could tell in this oblique presentation, she was small and dark with a bright flash of colour in her face and a shine in her dress which spilled the afternoon light straight at him as though it was soaking it up grey, cleaning it, and throwing it out at him, clear and bright. He glanced up at her, saw that she was reading an illustrated weekly magazine and not, after all, watching him. He looked down quickly at his *Telegraph*, and turned the page: somehow he bungled it, and the paper tore clear down the centre of the article about Dartmouth. He fumbled, awkward, trying to straighten it out. He felt himself blushing, and he would have left the room, there and then, only she spoke. In English, with an attractive accent, Czech.

She sounded amused, but not so amused as to be laughing at him.

She asked, smiling as though she, too, felt awkward about breaking the silence:

"Excuse me: I have been meaning to enquire. Why are your English newspapers printed on such fine, thin paper?"

\* \* \*

Grauermann coughed. He drummed his thick fingers on the desk, and told Moke:

"I would like you to understand several things, Doncaster. First, I am not satisfied with your conduct under this just and impartial investigation. You are deliberately obscuring the truth, much of which we know already." Moke stared at him, still with his mind in the reading room, not yet understanding the interruption. He'd been a day without food, and half a day standing, waiting for Grauermann: now he'd been sitting on the hard chair for three and a half hours. He wasn't as bright, as alert, as he might have been.

"During our recent talks you first of all admitted without any doubt or reservation that Crutchley hired you as a spy, to do spy's work. You admitted this freely and openly. Then later you changed your mind." Grauermann banged the flat of his hand down on the top of the desk. "In any court in the world a testimony loses value when it is changed. One version, if there are two, was a lie: the witness is, therefore, a liar. So. That's the first thing, don't lie to me any more, Doncaster"—the Russian's metallic French grated as though it needed oil while his voice rose sharply—"No more lies." Doncaster fought the

circles in his head, the rising fog. He told Grauermann, thickly:

"I haven't lied. You twist——" Grauermann yelled:

"Silence! How dare you interrupt me, you louse of a fascist spy!" He heaved himself angrily to his feet, and came quickly round the desk. He bent, put his face close to Moke's. "Hold your tongue, you miserable English vermin! Keep your filthy tongue still or I'll have it torn out, I swear I will! Keep your mouth shut or I'll have your teeth ground down into their roots!" He pulled back his hand and hit Moke hard in the mouth. Moke rocked back, the chair tilting on its back legs: the back of his head touched the wall, and Grauermann hit him again. The voice poured itself out in a stream of fury from the mottled, contorted face.

"I spend hours and days talking with you in a language I detest, talking and talking and being kind to you, you useless wretch, and you only throw my kindness and my time back in my face! Look at me, you—look at me!"

Moke looked up. His nose was bleeding profusely, and he could feel with the point of his tongue the newly-opened gaps in his lips. He wasn't at all sure about what was happening: there in the reading room of the British Council in Prague, excited by the girl's presence and frightened—well, worried—by her addressing him, but now suddenly out of the story and here with all this, the long hair matted right down over his neck and the floppy beard which he had started to grow once before but which he'd

shaved off after Jean had laughed at it and called it a Chinaman's beard. Not soft or silky now, but clogged and dirty, like the wool on an old sheep's belly. He said to Grauermann, speaking out of his rambling mind:

"If only I could get a haircut. A shave. I suppose a bath——" Grauermann, the shadow, the shape between him and the light, laughed:

"Baths? Haircuts? D'you think this is the Ritz? Buckingham Palace? How about a manicure? Eh? I didn't know we had a pansy in the place, a blasted queen. Want your hair curled, do you? Massage? Why, I'll give you massage—here!" He kicked Moke's shins, one after the other, with the toe of his right boot, two or three kicks on each shin. Then he changed over, stood on his right foot while he used the left to kick with.

"That better?" Moke sagged in his chair with the pain throbbing through and through and climbing, and blood running into his mouth so that he had to keep swallowing. What had Studeny said? "Tell yourself that some poor woman has to sleep with him, pity the woman." Moke thought: Sorry, not enough pity, not enough for me and for her as well. All right for Studeny, doesn't help me.

Grauermann was back on his own side of the desk.

"You are trying to tell me, to have me believe, that this girl, this decent Czech girl whom you later criminally assaulted, actually approached *you*! That it was not you but she who forced the whole filthy business along! You think that we will take the word of a self-confessed spy—yes, you've confessed it,

remember?—the word of a spy who's already lied to us on many occasions and changed his story from one lie to another, you think we'd take the word of a spy against that of an honest young woman whose uncle is a member of the National Front, an elected representative—eh? What sort of idiots are we supposed to be? How many more lies are we expected to stomach?"

Grauermann rose to his feet, immense against the light, a solid unanswerable threat with its brilliance edging him. "We've been patient with you, Doncaster, so patient—but there's a limit! You ogled her, didn't you? Sitting there at the table you had already determined to seduce her to your own ends, hadn't you? You'd hypnotised her, forced yourself into her acquaintance, you old enough to be her father and consumed with filthy lust for the decent, cleanly health of her? Eh?"

"No! Oh, no, I assure you, you're wrong, quite wrong——"

"Haven't you already admitted, you disgusting creature, that you had been staring at her and thinking filthy thoughts about her? Haven't you? Not twenty minutes ago, you trash—answer me!"

"No. All I said was——" Grauermann came back around the desk. He held his open hand under Moke's eyes, and slowly bunched it into a fist. He drew it back some nine inches, keeping it there under Moke's eyes. From that distance it was as big as the desk.

"It is possible that she felt your eyes on her and out of her embarrassment was compelled to speak? Out of fear?"

There was the fist. Moke nodded.

"Yes, I suppose so. But if she felt that I'd be awfully sorry, really, I had no intention——"

"Thank you. Not for the apology." Grauermann hadn't hit him, after all, he was back in his chair on the other side of the desk. Moke let his muscles relax.

"It's too late for apologies. Thanks for the truth, at last. You forced yourself on her, you forced your sinister, trained influence upon that young girl deliberately and for nothing but your own ends . . . so at last we have a little more truth. From now on, Doncaster, please keep to the truth. I am tired of having to dig for it, to waste time. Save me trouble, and save yourself——" the Russian laughed, shrugging his heavy shoulders. He added: "Well, it is easier, isn't it?"

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There wasn't anything in the room but the sound of her voice or its echo in his mind coming out of that light silk brightness, that young voice softly accented, the stirring of his own excitement. His awkwardness.

"These are airmail editions. Specially light for sending abroad, by air, you know."

"What good ideas! I had not heard before of such newspapers." She sounded delighted, as though he'd given her a present or told her an exciting secret: he heard something like admiration in her tone, admiration directed at *him*. She said: "I am studying English, for many years, that is why I come here to read. In the newspapers one can read the language

advanced, but with not complication. I think it is a good path to learn." He coughed.

"A good *way* to learn. Not *path*. If you don't mind my trying to help you." She shook her head.

"It is good! The practicals are most difficult to obtain, here in Prague, now more than before we are—can you say, 'cut off'?" She caught herself talking, and glanced quickly, anxiously round the room, which was empty except for the two of them. Seeing its emptiness, she smiled with relief. Her smile, Moke thought, was quiet, reassuring: it went with the width of her cheekbones, the distance between her eyes. Her hands, resting lightly on the table, looked firm and capable. He told her, amazed at his own courage:

"I'd be delighted to help you. As a matter of fact, I've spent most of my life teaching. I'd be very happy . . ." he heard his voice trail away across the table, heard her telling him:

"I am so happy to met! My name is Marie Duczak, please what is yours?"

"Doncaster." In his embarrassment he mumbled it. He hated the sound of his surname: it reminded him of headmasters and corrections and difficult situations and of the contemptuous way other people used it. More loudly he said, "Doncaster. James Doncaster . . . but if I may correct you again, not 'I am so happy to met'. The verb 'to meet' is transitive. You can say, 'to have met you', or 'that I met you'. Or for that matter, you can say 'that we met': in this case it is really an idiomatic usage, leaving out the words 'each other', so that the truly correct way would be to say 'that we met each other'. Otherwise the verb



requires an object. I hope you don't mind——" She laughed at him.

"If I did mind, could it change the English grammar?"

"I meant, mind my correcting you. I'm afraid it's a habit, but——"

"Of course I am so glad!" Again she looked over her shoulder at the door, and again he saw her relief. "The only people in our country now except for Czechs are Russians, soviets. It is not easy to have the opportunity for learning West languages. French one can learn, from some of the priests, but"—she spoke quietly—"even the priests are fewer, and must be careful of their teachings. Who knows when it will be a crime for a priest to teach French? Already it is treason to talk too much of God and the Saints. They say that there are many priests in the labour camps, do you think it is true? That Josef Beran himself is a prisoner up there in his great house, in his palace?"

Abruptly Doncaster forgot about her being a girl, an attractive woman. Forgot that here was a woman who had taken notice of him, accepted him as a fellow human and not just as something to laugh at. He forgot it all in a greater, more acute anxiety.

"Really, I can't tell you, I don't know at all," he muttered. "I'm not a politician, you know. I'm a schoolmaster, here they call me an Educational Adviser. I can't discuss such things, not my concern at all."

"Not your concern! You—English! It was not your concern at Munich, was it not either! Your 'Peace with Honour', yes Hitler's honour, and your

Chamberlain saying 'It is a quarrelling in a far-off country between peoples of whom we know nothing——!' Over Poland you are forced to war, then all heroic, saviours of Europe, despising the Americans who did not fight till later because to them it was even farther away and they knew perhaps less than your Chamberlain's 'nothing'." The girl was hissing her words at him across the table littered with its news and pictures. "We remember the Chamberlain speech, in our hearts. We know we are alone, to look to nobody but ourselves." The flame died in her eyes. "Forgive me, please. I did not intend, not intend at all. Only we need help so much, with this so soon after the other." She looked at him, and said: "To be free and have no fear, to trust, to say what you will say when you wish. Do you know how great this thing is that you have?" She looked down at the table and shrugged her shoulders. A shy look made him stronger but not less awkward, sorry at her being upset. "I talk too much to you now, here: I bore you with my too-much talking." Moke started to protest, none too cleverly in his embarrassment, but she ignored his stammering. "It is because outside in the streets of Prague, even with my own family in my home, I can say nothing, none of us can talk of other things than whether."

"Whether——?"

"The weather, the sunshine and winds, the weather——" Moke managed a chuckle.

"Of course. Sorry. But you know, in England, very few people discuss anything except the weather. It's supposed to be one of our national characteristics."

"So? Why is that?" Moke shook his head.

"Couldn't tell you. Except, perhaps, a natural reserve. A man who's clever, well, he talks about the weather, and he's not giving anything away, and a fellow who's stupid talks about the same thing and reckons to get away with it, too." She didn't look as though she understood.

"And how is the weather, in England?"

"Mostly rain." He laughed, as if it were a source of pride to him, that rain. She told him:

"It rains here often, also."

"Oh, not nearly as much as it does in England." He coughed, realising that he was by now committed to a conversation, and knowing that his conversation was no stronger than any of his other attributes. "But I have heard a theory that the weather all over the world has been worse since the end of the war, and that we can blame it all on the atom bombs." He smiled at her, weakly, not caring much himself for his conversational effort. "A childish thought but apparently acceptable to the simple mind." One way of disowning it. The girl smiled doubtfully at him. She said:

"I tell you a thing I think of. You can talk English to me, and I will show you my city. Shall it be an agreement?"

Moke felt the blush rising. An agreement—an understanding! To have her as a companion, day by day, or at any rate several days a week, not only now this minute in the reading room because they'd happened to meet! She'd asked him . . .

"Splendid!" He couldn't help his glance dropping

from her eyes to her full lips and her white throat: her shoulders looked firm and soft—strong. It was ridiculous, but—— “Splendid! It’s a bargain!” She could have been his daughter, if he’d had a child at all—and Jean had always told him that the lack of one was his fault. (He’d never seen a doctor about it for fear the doctor might have said the same thing.) But not *his* daughter. She was a woman—not his daughter: his mother, not his wife, a woman. And she’d asked him!

\* \* \*

It never occurred to him, of course, that the girl was making a deliberate set for him, that she was there in the reading room solely with the object of meeting him, in the course of her duties as a daughter of the National Front. He could never have imagined that the soviets, looking around for a propaganda ruse which would help them to get the British Council out of Czechoslovakia, could have picked on him as the stool pigeon, the man who’d be easy to twist into a confession which would involve the British Council not only here but in other places, too, all over the half-free world.

That wasn’t the sort of thing that could happen to him. It was altogether too far-fetched: it never entered his mind. No, this was the way it was, him here and she there, and she asking him and he overcome at the suggestion because, being cooped up in his own old fears and longings, the suggestion meant much more to his thirsty mind than it would have done to hers, even if she’d meant it honestly. So he

told her: "Splendid! It's a bargain!" She looked coldly out of her deceptively-decent face and she thought, in her own language: Sucker, silly old boob, you've swallowed the hook and soon you'll feel it in your little round belly.

\* \* \*

"You forced yourself on her. Let's not beat about the bush, Doncaster. I'm a patient man, but there's a limit . . . you forced yourself on her."

Moke shook his head. Grauermann raised his voice a little, and he raised his hand too, off the desk so Moke could see it, see it there bunched into a fist. Grauermann made sure that Moke had the fist well in his field of view.

They'd proved the effectiveness of their theories, on rats in special cages. They gave a rat two doors which he could choose from: he went through one of them, and he got hurt because he touched bare wires and the electric current stung him. When he used the other he met no pain, but he found a small lump of cheese. After a time the rat got to know which door was the one to use and which was the one to avoid: he got to know the doors so well that they could later give him an option on more than two, from one he'd have the shock, from another a smell he hated, from another a loud noise that worried him. Then they could take away all the shocks and the smells and the cheese too, and still the rat would take the door they'd trained him for.

But this particular rat, this Doncaster, wasn't reacting as well as he should. They'd picked him as an easy

specimen, a gift, and now he still shook his head from time to time when, by precedent and training, he should have nodded. So Grauermann showed him the fist.

"You forced yourself on her, deliberately. You sought her friendship and set out to pervert her. Admit the truth! You've already admitted it once—you can't go back on your own word!" Moke had his eyes on that fist. He recognised it. Watching it, he said:

"If she had that impression, I——"

"You forced yourself on her, didn't you?" There was the fist and hunger and the forgotten warmth of ordinary worries which weren't fears. There was the fist and his lips ready to split again where they'd been split before, eyes failing again and the dreadful rising jolts of pain which had been Kapanen beating the calves of his legs with an empty bottle. There was Majerle in the cell and the sudden unexpected hope, confident stare under the dark belligerent brows, and then as suddenly again no hope, only perhaps it was there still and Majerle too clever to let him see it. There was a sickness of hunger and dirt, and there was the fist. Always the fist, and under the table unseen but just as ready were the boots. Grauermann asked him:

"Why not make it easy for yourself? Why force us to—to *this*?" He stared at the fist as though it didn't belong to him, as though he regretted its presence. "Look, Doncaster, don't go on lying to me. Don't waste my time. Please." The Russian rose slowly to his feet, like an elderly ponderous priest

rising from his knees. He sent his chair skidding back away from the desk. He said: "Please don't make me do this sort of thing. It isn't necessary." He was right there beside Moke, towering over him, then bending to him: he put the first and second fingers of his right hand in the corners of Moke's eyes, and started to press.

"You forced yourself on her, didn't you?" Moke screamed, and Grauermann relaxed, stopped pressing with his two blunt fingers.

"Did you say you forced yourself on her? Did I hear that?"

"Yes! Please, I said I did- —!"

Perhaps it was only his imagination which gave him the impression that there was a smell of cheese in the room. Perhaps Grauermann had been eating cheese, and it was on his fingers. Without any doubt there was a smell of it.

\* \* \*

So she showed him the "Golden City" while she and he talked in English and she smiled with easy pleasure at the hearing of these words and phrases. He understood her pleasure her occasional delight: he himself, in the past, conducting minor historical research, had felt the same excitement at finding after long frustration the source of just the information which he sought. He could understand her happiness at finding, amidst the narrow, indoctrinated nationalism which was now the whole of Czech life, a guide in her search for a certain wider education. He looked down from his rostrum, down at his class of one, and

if from that elevation he saw sometimes down the front of her dress, well, the rostrum wasn't there so plainly as the rest, he was a man looking at a woman—and suddenly it wasn't fun, it was, indeed, an Old Moke, an aged laughable donkey breaking its head against a magic mirror. As long as the mirror lasted, he didn't mind that it was glass, as long as it had depth in its reflected vision the delight was his, and he hoped but at the same time refused to recognise such hope: not allowing it, knowing it to be vain and in any case disgusting, so he told himself: still he hoped, and the mirror lasted.

He saw the 'Golden City', but why they called it 'Golden' he couldn't tell. The adjective was too cheap. 'Golden' they used to describe the colour of hair, and of cornflakes they wrote it, too, in huge letters on irritatingly large breakfast-time packets. They used the word in travel pamphlets to describe anything which was ever touched by the sun. This city wasn't golden, it was black and white and silver, deep grey-gleaming stone and the easy flickering of the river, silver: old mellow stone reaching up step by step through the narrow, steep-reaching alleys.

He saw the castle, Hradčany, and from a small unexpected gateway leading nowhere from a nearby square he looked down upon the ancient city and the sleepy-gleaming river, and over the river to the Old Town. They counted the bridges which crossed the Vltava, strong, sturdy bridges, beautiful in their plain purpose of carrying the traffic of centuries, and with her amused prompting he pronounced their names: she told him the legend of Wenceslas, of the knight



whose statue stood surprisingly on the little Kampa beside the Charles bridge. St Wenceslas would ride from Blaník, said the legend, would come with his men when in their graves they and he would hear the groans of the Czech people, Wenceslas's people, in the hour of their greatest need: he would find the magic sword buried centuries ago by the knight on the Kampa, and with the sword he would sweep his own sweet land clear of her oppressors. The girl said:

"It was true. He came."

"Eh? Did he? When?"

"Did he not drive the Nazis out? Did our brothers not stain the cobbles with those fascists' blood?" He didn't get it.

"So you consider that you're free? That after the centuries of legend and promise your Wenceslas has done his work and—well, done it?" She looked embarrassed, as though she'd said something which she hadn't meant to say. Now she told him:

"He can ride again, can he not?" Moke nodded.

"I hope so. Indeed I do. Not that it's any of my business."

\* \* \*

Grauermann urged him:

"Come on. Get to the point. We know you spent some weeks working yourself into her confidence, into"—he laughed, a loud, coarse bray from his huge, smooth frame—"into more than her confidence. All right, so you did that, all among a lot of rotting bourgeois scenery. Let's come to the point, the—shall we call it the excursion?" Moke stared thickly at the amused impatient eyes.

"Excursion? You mean the picnic, when they arrested me?"

"Picnic! A fine word for it, you crab! Picnic, indeed!" Grauermann was tapping with the fingers of his left hand on the desk's top, a rhythmic padding of finger-tips like a drum's distant sporadic rolling. "The truth, that's what we're after, the truth, not your nonsense about picnics. Oh, I know, I've read it, all that rubbish of yours, she suggesting a picnic and you agreeing . . . she said to pick mushrooms, so you said—don't you know there aren't any at that time of year?" The fingers rolled their incessant drumming, not distant or brave like the drum of Khayyám, but here and now and dirty hurting finger-tips on a hard desk. "You even stated, so far as I recall, that you had no idea of where you were going or of what part of the country you were in. You couldn't read the notices which said that it was a prohibited area, could you? Of course not. Perhaps you thought that they said 'Keep off the Grass', or 'It is forbidden to start Fires'? She led you, huh? She had the idea and suggested it and you went along behind her like her little dog, eh? . . . Do I remember correctly? Is your nonsensical and stupid lying recorded accurately in my mind?"

Moke looked at him and away from him and saw the way the concrete walls burned at the light. He said:

"It's the truth. I can't change it."

"Can't you?" Grauermann was smiling now with something oddly brilliant in the smile. It was a brilliance which might have related to madness, only

it was less madness than method. "Can't you change it? Are you quite sure of that?"

This was the point they'd been climbing to. This was the picnic which she'd suggested, and he'd quibbled, most of the reason for the quibble being his own fear of his dreams of her, his tremulous elderly reluctance at the prospect of making a fool of himself. He'd looked at her and seen a suggestion in her smile, looked away and thought: You're an old fool, Moke, she doesn't ever think of you in that way, and in any case your mind moves faster than your body can or ever could act. One way was an impossible day-dreamt paradise (the few minutes of it and the longer subsequent depression, he knew about that from his Varsity days, but it'd be worse, far worse, now: harder the paradise and less rewarding harder the achievement of ecstasy, sharper the reaction, longer and deeper) and the other way was simply an old man finding once again that his physical ideas were as ridiculous as they seemed even at the outset to his colder, fearful logic. Right deep in his mind he heard the scream of Lawrence's tortoise in its futile urgency, pathos matching his own stumbling, hopeless urge.

"Very well," he'd said.

"You would like to come? Truly?" There was the smile: it wasn't one that could be ignored, but he told himself that he was misinterpreting its meaning, letting his need overpower his common sense: that she was smiling because she was naïvely glad that he'd let her show him the country, the unsurrounded reaches of the river, that she was glad of his tutorial companionship. She looked at him, surely, as at a

father. That was what he told himself, but at the same time he felt the stirring of his real and latent urgency and he told her:

“I’d love to. It’s a splendid idea . . . how do we get there?”

4

On that same evening, while Moke and the girl were talking about going on a picnic, there was an SNB raid on Goczan’s bar in the Old Town. It didn’t arouse much interest, because the SNB were always raiding one place or another, a bar or a house or a church, always arresting somebody. Nobody was particularly surprised to see the troopers fling themselves out of their trucks and surround the block, mounting machine-guns on the opposite pavements near the corners, crouching in doorways and behind their trucks. The SNB always acted as though they expected armed resistance from at least a couple of companies: ‘playing soldiers’, the people called it, but only in whispers, never in the streets or among strangers. Goczan’s bar was a pretty obvious target for a raid: all sorts of odd characters used it, people who didn’t seem to work regular hours, and that was a crime in itself. Black-marketeers, too—indeed, it was heard afterwards (through the aunt of one of the troopers who’d gone inside with the lieutenant) that it was a black-marketeer they’d arrested, dragged out of a cupboard at the back of the bar where he’d been hiding, the fool. A foreigner, they said he was, a Yugoslav by the name of Majerle. They hauled him out and pushed him into the back of the car with the

officers, and the car shot away making much more noise than it need have done. The troopers packed up their machine-guns and jerked open the bolts of their rifles, hoisted themselves disappointedly back into their trucks. It hadn't been much of a game. The trucks ground off, mumbling ponderously back to the SNB barracks, and after a couple of minutes' pause the citizens came out of their houses and stood around in groups in the street, wondering if it'd be worth their while to go in and see if there was any liquor loose in Goczan's bar.

PIERRE LA HOUSSE told himself that he was sick of the inside of the train and of its jolting and of the faces of his fellow passengers. True, he had a compartment to himself, but he'd been on the train ever since it left Mukačevo, and that was back along the line by all of five hundred kilometres. And every time he went to the dining-car, or to the dirty, rocking lavatory, he saw the same faces of his chance companions on this seemingly endless journey, saw them slopping their bowls of soup and talking in subdued voices over plates of half-sized, grey-yolked eggs: he squeezed past the other travellers where they lounged in the corridors, watching him come up towards them from the end of the coach and squeeze past them and trail on down to his own compartment, and they seemed to stare not only at him but also at the canvas bag which he carried slung over his left shoulder. All of them watched him, but then they, too, were probably bored—so he told himself. Yet he felt sure that somewhere among that procession of blankly-casual glances there was one, or perhaps more than one, which was by no means casual. La Housse had never been wrong before when he'd had this feeling of being watched or followed—both—and he had it now, strongly. The feeling hadn't been with him when he joined the train at Mukačevo (and where he'd been

before that he'd already put clean out of his mind, he'd forgotten about it) but it had struck him suddenly while they were stopped at the station at Kosiče, and since then it had taken root and now possessed him dangerously. Dangerous, all right, to have worry in your mind at a time like this when the main thing was to look as casual as a milked cow. He had no evidence, he'd seen no sign, he only had the hunch which hadn't been wrong before.

But this time it was different. There was something new which fooled him and spoilt his observation. And he knew what it was: while he told himself that he'd had the hunch before, that he was sick of the journey and the jolting and the bad food, he knew more clearly than anything else that he was frightened. It'd been a long time coming, fear. He sat there all by himself in the corner of the compartment with his swarthy, Breton face (like a walnut, so he'd heard it described) turned to the window, and while he knew, that he'd lost his nerve he told himself that he was bored and tired and that in any case this wasn't the first time he'd felt and known himself to be under observation.

He had the small suitcase and the rucksack on the seat beside him, and now he groped in the rucksack for his cigarettes. He didn't look down, only groped with his small, sensitive hand while his eyes watched the hillside, as if its quiet deserted stretch could give him peace or respite from the regular thump and jolt of the train, a remorseless, constant reminder that there was no turning back, nothing but to go on. His fingers slid around inside the bag, feeling for the

crumpled, half-empty packet, and they touched the hard round of the roll of toilet paper: the touch sent a tremor up his arm and into his brain. Pierre, he asked himself, smiling his hard smile at a flock of goats, Pierre, my old friend, how can this be? Surely, not you?

None of the others would have believed it. Not even if he'd told them himself. The men he'd worked with in the desert, parachuting behind the German lines, living there for weeks on nothing much more than the strength of their own bodies and iron rations and sometimes raw meat (no cooking, no smoke to spiral against the clear and burning sky), the few of them living there with their packs of dynamite and their knives which knew not infrequently the feel of men's throats, silent in the dark. They'd have called any man a liar who'd say that Pierre La Housse could ever be scared of anything less savage than his Sudanese mistress. And after the desert he'd joined a new outfit: he and an Englishman and a couple of Norwegians had teamed up to man a caique, and they sailed it out of Beirut to the islands in the Ægean, carrying supplies to partisans and sometimes doing a little sabotage. Every time they came back they brought along a few passengers, sometimes escaped Allied prisoners and sometimes kidnapped Germans. In those days they'd called him Press-On-Pierre, and he'd been known by that name all over the Levant.

It had all been fun, sport. That and hating the enemy. Pierre thought back over it, and over the post-war years, most of them spent on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain, and it seemed ridiculous to him



that after all the other jobs he'd done he should suddenly, now, be afraid.

He studied the landscape, his cigarette glowing red while he dragged hard at the smoke, and he thought: To lose the nerve at Base, and not to go, that is one thing, but to lose the nerve on a job, that, my friend, is the very dangerous matter. A man without the nerve is no good at all. He is in the greater danger . . .

La Housse was good enough and trained enough in his job to tell himself that the sooner he could get rid of his 'goods', as Gerry always called them, the better. If he could have, if there had been now any person to whom he could have handed over the 'goods' and the job, he'd have done so, and ducked out. But there wasn't anyone else, not until he could get to Trotter, in Prague. The 'goods' were in the bag beside him on the seat, and he had to get them to Trotter. He had to pass them on. He'd not the slightest idea of their contents or of their value, he only knew that he had to get them, one way or another, to Prague. After that he could throw a fit or drown himself, it didn't matter. All that mattered was that the roll of lavatory paper should continue on its westward course.

Trotter, he thought, would be getting anxious. He was a fortnight late already on the rendezvous. Pierre was glad that Trotter couldn't see him now, couldn't be here to sweep him with that powerful stare which was like a broadside and with its sheer strength could knock away any camouflage in its path. A bull of a man. But no fool: they'd worked together before,

these two, and they knew each other as well as men ever could. Pierre dragged smoke hot into his lungs, and he thought: I must recover myself before I meet you, my friend. You of all people must not see Press-On-Pierre without his famous nerve. You—of all people, I do not want to see that in your eyes, I do not want you falling silent suddenly when my name is mentioned among our friends. I do not want your sadness or your compassion. I want your friendship and your respect, both of which I have had for a long time and value highly. It is only that I have taken one job too many, only that: I am the same man, your friend; I am Press-On-Pierre, whom you have known for years, and I would like to be remembered by that name and in that spirit.

The end of his cigarette was a hard, red cone with the fire still in it, not even a speck of grey ash on it, because his forefinger had tapped and tapped, joggled and tapped, acting on its own while he'd been staring out of the window at hills and wisps of cloud and a flock of goats apparently untended near a deep-sunk stream. None of that meant anything, it was only what was in front of his eyes which recorded everything as they had been trained to do. Only the . . . but—yes, *that* meant something. Gripping his reflexes tight he watched it, the shadow, no, not shadow, reflection: image of a man in the dirty glass: it stood there not six inches from his nose, the cloudy reflection of a man outside his compartment, in the corridor. Facing this way, judging by the tilt of his hat, and yes, the faintly lighter sign of hands: standing in the corridor, alone, looking in. Standing there with-

out moving—what was this, a short film, a badly-executed Edgar Wallace?

Pierre leant slowly forwards in his seat, dropped the stub of his cigarette on to the gritty floor between his feet. He moved the toe of his left foot, pivoting on the heel, and pressed the fire out of the stub into the grit of the floor. Then, casually, he sat back, smoke still curling from his wide nostrils, and he glanced easily, cheerfully, at the glass partition which separated his compartment from the corridor.

It was like a sudden blow between the eyes! He started half to his feet, one fist clenched and the other on the rucksack at his side, and he told himself: No! Surely, this cannot be! I, Pierre La Housse . . . no! The corridor was quite empty. He sat back, disgusted with himself, and examined again the window on his left, the glass in which he'd seen the reflection. He observed the fall of shadow on the glass, the twin reflections of light which had looked like hands, and suddenly he found a chuckle rising in him. He laughed out loud—really, it was too good a joke! Pierre La Housse had been frightened by a shadow! Press-On-Pierre seeing bogeys in a dirty window!

The train-beats shouted Meet Trotter, meet Trotter, meet Trotter. Pierre thought: Perhaps it were better not. If I am, as I think, not alone, if there is, indeed, some scab of a soviet policeman on my tail, better not lead him where he wants to go. In any case, better try first to shake loose. Wag my tail hard and see if it doesn't drop off. He thought: Name of God, what's this 'better' business? It's my job, my duty!

Would I have run with my double infection (one of the guts and the other of the tail) to my friend Trotter, perhaps said to him quickly:

"Here you are, my old friend, here is what I had to bring you, and this gentleman here, this fine one behind me, he is here to arrest us both!" As well to go now into the dining-car and to address the passengers, offer the paper to the one most in need of it. He grinned to himself, and he thought: It's me that needs it, it's me with the gut trouble.

Pierre gave himself another cigarette, and in his mind he began to construct a map of the country round about him and of the possible alternative approaches to Prague. Under the concentration of thought, and with the immediate prospect of violent exercise, the tenseness eased. He noticed that his fingers, holding the cigarette, had steadied. He didn't even need the cigarette: only half-smoked, he dropped it close beside the remnants of the other, and with his heel he ground them into one.

He thought: A place to leave this loathsome conveyance will be Kolin. Then I can take another, or better still go on foot, up the Labe Valley, say as far as Mělník, then come down into the capital along the river. Poor old Trotter, he'll have to wait a little longer, that's all. No doubt he will have some pleasant way of passing the time, that old Trotter, no doubt he's made himself comfortable, his own sort of comfort, and my sort too. Pierre saw in his mind the new route that he'd take after he left the train at Kolin: up the valley almost to its top, then, depending, of course, on whether or not he was alone by

then, down the Vltava to Prague. He thought, that Vltava! How they love their old Vltava! How they look at it as though there were no other people in the world who had a river of their own. We all love our rivers. The Seine and the Thames, and that old Volga, which was meant for better things. Perhaps one day there'll be life around the Volga again, perhaps one day the Volga will find that her own son, Russia, has come back, displacing the nasty cantankerous murder-minded soviet, the step-child which was none of her own making.

Pierre thought: God meant the world to have light. God meant us to live in the light, all of us, including the Russians. His will be done.

At Pardubice it was that the fat woman joined him in his compartment. Her arrival set his nerves on edge again—he'd been feeling almost normal, for a time, forcing his mind at first into normal, easy channels, then letting it run on lines of its own choosing, its own outlets and its own speed. That was the secret, of course, or at any rate *had been*. You ignored the fact of danger, you were unaware of anything unusual or sensational in your occupation, in what you were paid to do. You went ahead and coped with it as it came along, sometimes all smooth and sometimes rough in places: you did your job as simply and as matter-of-factly as a clerk in an insurance company kept his card-index system. And when you were back, resting, chatting over a bottle and two glasses with someone like—well, someone like Trotter—neither of you spoke of danger or of fear. Danger was no more in your mind than the fear of getting the sack

was in the insurance clerk's. It was a job. Well, more than a job, much more: admit it, he told himself, face up to it: all your life it's been a love and a hate as well.

Not the stupid film hate, the false or deliberately aroused emotion. This was a matter of knowledge. It was knowing and recognising evil and its effects on ordinary, small people. It was knowing how little hope a small man has when he meets the full force of organised evil. It was being man enough to hate injustice and to be prepared to fight and fight and hate and fight it and never to think of it as anything but an enemy. These were the necessary qualifications for the job.

Not an easy job to fill. A man could do it, seeing plain in front of his face the evil of the open enemy, and if he didn't lose his nerve he could go on doing it. But he must train his mind not to think too broadly. Thinking broadly did two things. First, it fixed that nerve. Second, it opened a man's eyes too wide. It took the blinkers off and let him see that injustice was around him on all sides and on all levels, and that because of this the end of each battle would inevitably be the start of a new one: it showed him that men were not to be trusted, and that the rot in men of every nationality and faith was fouler than the most unpleasant refuse left around on pavements by dogs. Only there were happily some men who, recognising that in themselves as in their fellows there was that load of filth clamouring for an outlet, knowing the beastly power of the poison in reserve, kept their hands at their sides or tied them fast behind

their backs, in some cases destroyed themselves partly or wholly rather than touch the tap.

The fat woman nodded to him before she sat down, and he bowed in his seat. He noticed that she had no luggage, not even a parcel, not a bundle or a bag. Heavily wrapped in clothes which had no shape, she slumped down in the corner facing him, and stared without expression out of the window. A slight unavoidable wobble of the flesh on her face was her only noticeable reaction to the train's jerking, reluctant start: she watched fatly while the station drew its greyness off like an old sock from the end of the train, and as the moving countryside filled and passed the window her eyelids drooped, jerking down almost as if their movement was geared to that of the train. Pierre thought: She's soon asleep. Not even resting back, but upright: well, she doesn't have to lean, she's well rooted on her bulk. I ought to feel sorry for her: it must be dreadful for a woman to look like that . . . some disease. But I'm not at all sorry for her . . . I hate the sight of her. Why? . . . Something nasty in the eyes, something there that struck me. That, and my busted nerve.

After half-an-hour he couldn't stand her there in front of him. It was like sitting in front of a grotesque, trembling Buddha. Pierre rose quickly, careful not to wake her, and with the greatest care, he slid the compartment door open. From the corridor he looked in at her, and still she sat quivering with the motion of the train, eyes heavy-curtained and the mouth thick, soft like a rotten plum. He fought her image and the train's rocking all the way down the two

coaches to the dining-car: the waiter stood there in the aisle between his bare-topped tables, staring no welcome at the little, troubled Frenchman.

"Coffee." Pierre pushed himself in behind a table, against the window. "Coffee, please." The waiter stared down at him.

"No milk." Pierre didn't take his eyes away from the window.

"I don't want milk. Just coffee, black." The waiter shrugged.

"No sugar." Pierre's fingers gripped the edge of the table. He glanced casually at the surly, disinterested flunkey.

"Just coffee. Bring me plain, black coffee. Enough for two, and be sure it's hot." The waiter shambled up the coach, flipping his dirty napkin at the tops of the tables on his left. He grumbled to himself as he went along . . .

"Three meals a day for next to nothing, they get, and now it's coffee in between, if you please. Middle of the afternoon." He raised his voice, and called to the cook: "Hey, Herbie! Coffee wanted." He let the swing door crash behind him, and he added: "I told the little runt he couldn't have milk or sugar. Just give him coffee. *That's* more'n he's worth . . ."

The waiter carried the coffee (in a pot, with a small cup-and-saucer beside it on the tray) from the galley into the car. He opened the galley door by shoving it back with his shoulder, and he eased past it keeping it open with his broad, rounded shoulders against it. When he moved out down the aisle of the dining-car the door swung and swung again, thudding a soft flop



three or four times before it stopped. The waiter clumped the tin tray down in front of Pierre, and some of the coffee slopped over the edge of the pot.

"Your coffee." Pierre nodded. It smelt more like tea.

"Thank you, my friend." The waiter groaned, and said loudly:

"Oh, no! Not another! Oh, for Christ's sake, another one!" He stood there with his hands on his hips over the top of his stained, frayed apron, and watched the fat woman trundle herself along the aisle towards him. With a sudden twist she forced her enormous rump into a seat, three tables down from where Pierre sat watching her. The waiter stared at her, too. He thought, Jesu, what a number! That's what you get like, eating between meals! He grinned to himself, and nodded at her. "Yes?"

"Coffee," she said. "Same as that citizen over there has. Hurry with it, now." The waiter gave her one of his coldest looks.

"No milk or sugar," he told her.

"Certainly not. I'm on a diet: can't you see for yourself? I'm slimming." She began to laugh, shaking quietly, almost painfully, and the dampness gathering in the corners of her eyes and running down the channels of her face. She sat there looking from the waiter to Pierre and back again to the waiter. Her whole body shook, like a huge, poisonous jelly.

Perhaps it was coffee and perhaps it wasn't. Perhaps it was real and perhaps not. Pierre wasn't sure, he didn't have room to think about it, he didn't care. He had an idea that he drank a cupful of it and that it

burnt his throat, and there might or might not have been a quick reaction from his taste, something in the taste department of his mind saying: That isn't coffee, that's hot, dirty water. *Her* water, *his* water—suddenly he saw a possible enemy in the coffee, and he pushed the empty cup away across the rocking table-top. The bill was there on a corner of the tray, a figure sprawled across a grubby scrap of paper: he put the coins down on it as he rose and hurried slowly, trying to make the hurry casual, natural haste as he passed her waiting for her coffee, eyeing him sideways with her damp, unhealthy interest.

Was it the country passing the windows, or only himself passing windows full of fields? It was the coach, the first one, then the jointed, awkward platform and another coach with his own compartment at the end of it. He felt that he'd come a couple of kilometres before he reached it, but he was telling himself: Pierre, you fool, you blundering stupid craven fool, take a grip on yourself, go back and finish your coffee. Say you'd lost your ticket, or tell the waiter coarsely about the troubled condition of your inside. (Don't tell him the truth, Pierre, don't tell him how the guts have failed for good and all!)

That I could do. I could return and announce the successful accomplishment of a natural function. No, but hardly! On my way here I have already passed two conveniences, one at the end of the diner and the other between the two coaches. In urgency, I would have stopped at one of those. He thought, paper? I came for paper? No. Never mention paper. Never. It'd give the old bitch an opening, a flying start, if

they have any real idea of this affair. She might ask to borrow it—and then? Could I say, I regret, Madame, this paper is not for you. It is of a special type, as one might be permitted to say, a prototype, an affair of the future. It is not for you, Madame, this paper of mine, it is for higher things.

A mill waved its arms around on the hillside, and looking at it Pierre told himself: Hold on, mon vieux. Stinking coward, worthless as you are, hold on! All right, Mill, wave your silly empty arms, I don't care, only—hold on, Pierre. Take a tight hold and hang on. Only a little way to finish the job, and then no more jobs. The quiet life and the comfortable chair. Worth holding on for. Finish this, and nobody but you will know the shame. You'll spoil nobody's sleep but your own. *Only hold on.* I'm sorry, Mill, I didn't intend to be offensive about your empty arms. Perhaps you're waving at another mill that I can't see from here, and perhaps he's waving just as hard at you, neither of you able to move except to wave. That, indeed, would be a hard life, to be confined to waving. But I didn't intend addressing you in offensive terms, Mill. So easy to be offensive, and I beg your pardon. Impoliteness is for the middle classes and the Germans. I am neither, Mill, I am only afraid. Once I shot a man because he was afraid. His fear was a danger to us all, and I shot him. In the back of the neck, as they do in soviet prisons. Believe me, Mill—you're going?—believe me, I'd shoot myself, here and now, except that I haven't the right. I had the right to kill *him*, for sure, but in this position I have no right to take my own life

until my small burden is on its way. My life is tied to this package, bound fast with a knot which is fashioned from my soul. Blast the package and the bond! Would my life not be a fair exchange? The mill had gone, but he saw its arms waving in protest and he heard its answer, No! There may be a million lives in your package, there may be life and there may be death, there may be nothing of any importance. It is not for you to pass judgment on its value, Pierre, you are the carrier and not the assessor. You are right when you say that your life belongs to the package. Your life has nothing to do with you. Your life is that roll of lavatory paper.

His hand rested in its place on top of the rucksack, its strap up around his shoulder, and he knew that here, in truth and under his hand, was something much greater than himself. He had to live until it was safe, and his own safety was of no consequence except in so far as it affected the parcel. His life on its own was nothing, and his death would be less than nothing.

To Gerry it would come as a shock, a matter for grief. A loss. But then, Gerry was not in possession of all the facts. The matter of the lost nerve—Gerry wouldn't have reckoned on that. Not from Pierre La Housse, Press-On-Pierre. Gerry'd have laughed at the suggestion.

"If a man doesn't have a nerve in the whole of his body, where can he find one to lose?"

You'd be surprised, Gerry. You'd be shocked. Only if I can help it, you won't ever know.

She had to turn sideways to get her bulk into the

compartment. He made himself look up at her, politely, the look that one traveller gives to another to whom he does not feel particularly inclined to speak. She smiled at him, and the smile did nothing towards making her expression more attractive. Pierre remembered having read or heard a theory that if an unattractive person had a smile which improved or altered pleasantly the person's facial expression, he or she was a great deal better than the appearance indicated. In this case, though, there was no improvement. She grinned at him, and asked:

"You didn't like the coffee?" Her question ended in a rush of air, an expelled flood of relief as she sank back and took with her body the shape of the corner facing him. "A most violent dislike you took to the coffee?" She chuckled, staring right at him as though she owned him and could with a flick of her thick fingers force him to stand on his hind legs and balance a lump of sugar on his nose. But Pierre frowned at her, recognising none of her implied possession. Only self-possession and stern disapproval stabbed at her out of every line in his dark, tough face.

"The coffee was excellent. Everything that we have is of fine quality, Madame, now that the Ministries are guided by the truly democratic spirit of the people's elected representatives. Soon it will be even better, our standard of living will be second to none. . . . You have some criticism of the coffee?"

Either sweat or spittle coursed downwards from the corners of her twitching mouth. Her eyes had grown wide while he was speaking, but now they

were half-closed while she struggled in helpless mirth like a writhing, harpooned whale. Pierre drew himself up stiffly in his seat. He looked affronted, but out of the corner of his eye he saw Kolin. This was the beginning of the town, the train slowing perceptibly as the buildings grew thicker on either hand. This was near time: couldn't she have stayed in the diner for another ten minutes, blast her? Of course she couldn't. She's doing her job, he thought, this repulsive old cow is just as hard at work as I am.

"Madame is amused. Madame doubts the real benefits of our people's transition from the dark to the light? My opinions are worthy of Madame's scorn?"

"Oh, no!" She stared at him, blankly, refusing to allow her obvious inner amusement to reach the skin and muscle of her face. "Indeed not. Only I thought, forgive me the impertinence, that if, indeed, you appreciated the excellence of the coffee, there must have been some other reason for your precipitate departure—perhaps myself!" Again the shaking, slobbering laughter. She glanced down at her huge, widespread knees. "Am I a designing woman, temptation to be avoided? Do you run from me to preserve the immaculate political hygiene of your intellect, or is it the pox you're scared of?"

Pierre looked hurt and puzzled. He saw the widening streams of railway lines, buffers and the rising slopes of platforms. He murmured:

"Excuse my stupidity, Madame, but my mind cannot entirely follow the complicated paths of your own imagination. As to the coffee, embarrassing as it is

to discuss with a strange lady a matter of such personal and usually undiscussed—er, such a matter—well, I have a disturbance. A sickness of the bowels. I avoided neither you nor the coffee, Madame, I only averted catastrophe.”

The train had stopped while he was speaking, but he showed her no sign of his interest in the halt. He let his gaze grow troubled as he studied the goods train stopped outside their own: he frowned slightly as he stared out of the window at the tarpaulined trucks only a couple of feet away, and one of his hands (the right one, because the left still rested on the canvas bag) strayed up to cover the lower buttons of his waistcoat. Suddenly he leant forward, almost doubled in his seat, and he allowed her to detect a small groan of anguish.

“You’re really unwell?” In answer he flung her a quick, furious glance.

“Please, Madame, do not speak to me! I’m sorry, but for a moment——”

“Then go! Quickly, you foolish man!” She repeated, “Go!”

“It is not allowed.” He spoke to the floor, thinly, speaking between his teeth. “While the train is at rest, it is forbidden to make use of them. There is a notice——”

“Don’t be a fool. In such an emergency——” He looked up at her.

“You think so? Really?”

“Go!” He flung himself across the compartment and out of the narrow door. He heard her laughter behind him as he ran in four long strides to the space

outside the lavatory where there were two doors, one on either side, one on the platform side and one to the tracks where the line of shrouded trucks waited for him. Nobody there, nobody in sight, only the back of a peasant arguing with his wife on the platform. This was the luck he'd banked on. He put his arm out of the window of the off-side door, and opened it, then out, down on to the step, crooked an arm over the sill of the other open window, changed the weight to that arm and a foot braced against the side of the train. Pierre swung the door shut, gently, no disturbance, no swinging, open door. Then he dropped into the cinders between the tracks, ran towards the engine, keeping close in to the train's side in case the woman might be looking out of her window. He passed the length of the next coach before he judged it to be safe, then flung himself on to his hands and knees into the gap between two trucks. He scrambled under the coupling to the far side of the trucks. He was alone. Behind him there were no whistles, no shouting. No excitement.

He jumped, locked his fingers over the edge of the truck's side, hauled himself up and under the tarpaulin, over the high wooden edge and down into the dark, on to stacked bales, hard and damp. By their stink he knew them to be composed of wet hides, unsalted, on their way to the tannery. He knelt on one of the bales, giving his eyes a chance to get to work on what little light there was under the heavy cover, and at that moment he heard the other train begin to move. He heard first the whistle and then the piston's thud: instinctively he gripped more



tightly on the rucksack. He thought: You've got my spare shirt, you old bitch, my spare shirt and only pair of shoes that ever kept the water out. You've got my only suit. But you've got no stop ahead of you before you get to Prague! Laugh yourself into a sweat over that. You haven't got anything that matters; I've got that. Hang on, Trotter, I'll be a little later still, but I'll be with you. •

Possess your savage soul in patience, Trotter, take a drink or two and one for me while you wait. I'll be there before you even get your boots off. What's another week?—I'm a fortnight late already.

Shouldn't have come in here. Wouldn't have, he thought, except to prove to myself that I had a nerve. That everything here inside of me was all right. It *was*—it isn't now, I *had* a nerve—I haven't now. Only a stupid pointless bravado, and I'm trying to kid myself with it. I ought to know by now that I can't be fooled so damn easily. I ought to know a lot of other things that I don't know. I ought to have known before I started that this would be one trip too many. Hadn't I heard often enough about others who went on too long? Didn't anyone else know enough to see it and stop me? They can tell with fighter pilots, generals and submariners, can't they tell with agents?

The old days are over, Pierre. (Do I know you well enough to call you by your Christian name? Shouldn't it, perhaps, be more formal, now that there's this distance between Press-On-Pierre and Pierre La Housse?) You've called one hand too many, and the

cards are on the table. If you don't like them, whose fault is it?

A man couldn't sit alone, in a pub like this, a Czech country inn. He had to join the crowd around the long table, edging the table with their beers on the pencil-scarred mats. Each time a man had a new glass, the proprietor added a new indelible V to the other V's already on the paper scoreboard. Useful things, they caught the drips and kept the score. . . . That's it, think about the details, like a tourist, join in the noisy talk and perhaps it'll help your trembling nerve. Perhaps you'll soak up some of this peasant strength, derive from their conversation some of the slow, powerful sweep of their restful strength, the broad blades flashing as they fell the cane, so many canes to each sweep, so many cuts to each bundle, that many bundles to a cart-load. Then the carts rolling north up the valley to the mill where the cane was wanted and waited for, crushed into running crude syrup which later would be sugar. All that in all the daytimes, dawn to dusk, but now to relax and it was still in their eyes, the blades swung and the cane fell even now in their tired, thoughtful peasant eyes.

He looked down into his beer, and he thought: Jesu, I *had* a nerve, I *had*! Sweet Mary, is this the answer for the killing, the return for the blood which I myself have shed? Is this knowledge of fear your punishment for my having killed a man who knew it too well for our own safety? Give me rather than this his own relief, a bullet as he had, give me that rather than this fear and failure: save the punishment for later.

He raised the glass to his lips, and he thought:

Am I on my knees so soon, have I surrendered to religion because I am afraid? Am I twice a coward? Then he thought: Perhaps I am afraid because I have always spurned that strength, faith, perhaps now I *see* what I have deliberately avoided, telling myself that it was weakness to embrace in times of extremity a deity which in cold sober logic one could not believe existed. Now I am taught? Now I learn that I was not after all strong enough to do without it? . . . Am I thinking truth, or am I whining again? He bit on the edge of his glass, the beer cool on the edge of his lip, and he thought: Jesu, I know now. I have always known, only I could not reconcile the one with the other. I should have been able to, but I never dared to pause and think it out; I relied always on my own unaided strength and now that it has failed I see the truth. I see it.

Hell I have always understood to be a matter to be coped with after death, not before. Let me die in *this* life before I fail in it. I make no excuses. Forgive me, but even now I feel that what I have done and worked for was right, in a sense *Your* right. Tell me that I was wrong, and I will believe You: only let me die first and tell me then; if You will, give my soul to the fire, but for another moment in Your huge time let me live. *Let me, dear God, see this package on its way. Allow me the strength to do that.* Then punish me under the terms of Your ten commandments, and before You start I wish to plead Guilty to at any rate half their number.

The question had been addressed to him. He nodded, blinking.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I know it. A fine place. A thriving town."

"When were you there last?" It was the youngster with the wideset eyes and the thin, curved nose. "Long ago, perhaps?"

"A year or two. Perhaps three." The young man shrugged his broad shoulders. Broad from the scythe, the short scythe among the sturdy, juicy cane.

"It's full of soviets. Bloody commissars in uniforms, don't know their arses from their elbows. It's not our town any more." His voice rose, light and bubbling as the beer which stood upon the table in heavy-handed glasses. "They might as well move the frontier and be done with it!"

"Gents—a drink? A glass of beer?" The proprietor, an anxious smile on his sunburnt face, stood close to the youngster's elbow. "Your glasses are empty, or near enough." More quietly he asked: "Please, I ask you, no politics. For my family's sake, please." His voice rose again. "Seven, or is it eight?" It was his own, old joke: were they offering him a glass? The young man grinned up at him as though the joke was new.

"By the sound of it, it's eight." The publican laughed.

"Thank you. But my young friend, these eight will cost you nothing, but no politics. A bargain?"

They looked at him. No politics? No smiles. No free and easy speech, even here, where men came to be easy? No talk? The publican looked quickly round at them.

"Will you drink with me, gentlemen?"

A glass of beer for freedom of speech? Free drinks for a gag? What was a pub for? The young man spoke quietly:

"Uncle. Rather give us water, and let us speak our minds." But the older man's face stayed set, and the younger rose to his feet, powerful in his youth. He looked searchingly round for the eyes which refused to meet his. "Can we drink and sing but not speak? Have we permission to remain alive?" Pierre stared at the small space of table between his hands. He counted the V's on his beer-mat and the young man bellowed: "Are we Czechs? My brothers and my fathers, is this our house or our prison? When my own father drank his beer in this room, was he told 'Shut your mouth. Drink and be silent'? Was he told that? Would he have liked to live to hear it? Did my father die for free beer or did he die for freedom?"

Pierre thought, cynically, it's worth a cheer. Mention a death and it's always worth a cheer. But the others weren't cheering. They had wives and families, lives and futures. The time would come, but it hadn't come yet. Shouting wouldn't call it closer. The silence was complete, but warm. That wasn't good enough for the young farmer: he was young so that he could see and hear and shout, but not feel.

"So. This is your house" He stared at the proprietor. "Keep it." He turned his back on them, and clumped in his heavy boots across to the doorway. He put out his hand to the latch, then withdrew it and turned instead to face them.

"Keep it. I drink only with *Czechs*." The door slammed behind him. In silence under the sting of his

insult they drank their beer and his words echoed, "I drink only with *Czechs*." So for the young one, the hot-head, the one without experience. They raised their glasses, and the beer ran down through their mouths into their throats, but none of them thought: We are drinking. What their eyes said was what their hearts had learnt to live on: We are waiting. We have only to wait. We have waited before, and the strength of the hard-pressed spring is greater than that which has not been forced close to the point of breaking. We have our labour in the fields: the knives swing in our hands and the tall cane falls, but only when the time is right. We do not cut green shoots.

Pierre excused himself from his neighbours at the table. He stepped back carefully over the bench, and with his empty tankard in one hand and his beer-mat in the other he crossed the room to where the proprietor was steadily wiping glasses and lining them on a shelf in threes like soldiers drawn up for the next battle.

"Tell me what I owe you." He handed over the mat. "Four beers and the food." The proprietor totted it up quickly with his indelible pencil, and he showed the calculation and its result to the Frenchman whom he thought to be a Czech. He said:

"I should apologise for the disturbance. Usually we have no such unpleasantnesses. We all know each other, you see . . . he'll be back tomorrow evening, the youngster, mark my words." By the studied conviction of his tone, Pierre felt that it wasn't by any means all that sure. He looked at the other man, who read the question in his eyes. Pierre was think-

ing: If you all know each other so well, why didn't you let it ride? Why shut the lad up, all among friends?

"You saw that one by himself, who sat here, the one who left an hour ago?" Pierre stiffened, sensing something. Yes, he'd seen the man, only vaguely: he'd been too preoccupied with his own hunger and thirst to pay much attention to a casual drinker.

"Well?"

"A stranger, like yourself." The owner shrugged his heavy shoulders. "I have a nose for people," he said. "I didn't much care for the smell of that one. Not at all. Incidentally, he asked me who *you* were! He told me that he was sure by your looks that you were a relation of his wife's family, and he asked me what you did here in the valley." The old man snorted with contempt. "I tell you. I didn't fancy the man at all, staring at people and asking all manner of questions about them."

"What did you tell him?"

"What could I? I told him nothing. I said: Ask the gentleman yourself. Go and ask him, if you want to know, I said, don't bother me with your questions. If you want beer, I said, if you've come here for beer or wine or a snack to eat, well enough, you need only ask, I said, and I'll give it to you. That's what I'm here for, I said. But if it's prying into other people's affairs, well, I said, this in an inn, not an information bureau! Straight, I told him. He didn't like it, I can tell you, he gave me a nasty look and he walked out without even a Thank-you. Townsman: no manners, townsmen don't have. But *I* told

him a thing or two! Your change, sir, and thank you."

"Did he ask anything else about me?"

"Just your name and what you did here. I told him: Ask the chap yourself, I said, don't come round me with your questions——"

"Thank you. If anyone else should ask, my name is Malgec. I have come down from Melnik and I am on my way to Kolin to visit my brother-in-law who works there in the Sugar Control Office. You overheard this, I did not tell you. You heard me chatting with some of your patrons. You understand?"

"But, of course!" The proprietor winked. "Of course! A publican's ears hold twice as much as the largest of his barrels—no doubt you've heard the saying? But if that one should come back to me with his questions I'll tell him nothing except what sort of woman I have no doubt his mother was. I'll tell him——"

"Thank you. Good-night." The murmur of their subdued, concerted Good-night: God's night, anyone's night. The door closed softly behind him, shutting out the yellow lamp-light, and the moon was there instead with its shadows which it carried round with it for ever from one night to another and one country to another: the shadows were the moon's props for the stages it deliberately set, madness, romance and murder. A bad night for the moon when all it could raise was a howl or two from a dog.

So I was right. He pulled his jacket close across his chest as a defence against the cold night wind, and he thought: I was right, even now they're on to me.



Easy for them. Nothing about espionage, nothing to give the people or the policemen ideas. An easy charge of rape, or of having assaulted and robbed a cripple of ninety-four. Something of that sort, something really nasty to make me a public enemy. Nothing about espionage.

Lights ahead. Church. The one I saw earlier, when I was starting out but decided like a fool to fill my belly first. To give myself a lesson in not being afraid. Fool that I was.

He'd been avoiding lights, but this was a church, and he needed to stop somewhere and think things out. He felt, too, an urge to pray. All right, he thought, I've admitted my cowardice once, I'll pray. I'll do what I've wanted to do time and time again over the last fifteen years: what I've never let myself do. I'll pray. Not for me, God, for the package: not for me, for what's written there in the centre of my hygienic but for some reason slightly unprayerful roll of paper.

He thought: I'm finished, I'm no use. Either I'm right in thinking that I'm under their watch, or I'm so jittery that I'm imagining it. Either way I'm more of a danger than a help to the operation. He passed quietly into the soft deserted candle-light of the church, he knelt in the dimness close to a pillar in the rearmost pew, and from his knees he told God and the Virgin: Don't think I'm praying for myself. I'm not. Sweet Jesu, I'm praying for this roll of paper, for the lives that it will save and for the justice of its cause. It may not be exactly Your cause, I've never heard it referred to as a Crusade, but its

cause is distinctly closer to Yours than to the devilry it seeks to oppose. Tell me what I must do; show me, God, if the cause is true as I believe it to be, show me now!

And he saw it. Or was he shown? Under his eyes the line of hassocks stretched to each end of the narrow pew, and they were all the same, dull purple, knee-worn velvet. But under his own knees the cushion was of faded royal-blue, and on the blue it bore in silver a single fleur-de-lis. Pierre looked up, bewildered by the sudden decision which he could not feel to have been entirely his own, and he gazed astonished at that high crucifix glittering with reflected candle flames: his eyes sought those under the thorn crown, and clearly from that pain-quiet image he felt and recognised its truth.

He lowered his forehead to rest upon his bent left arm, and he thought: I must hurry. I haven't much time.

"STAND up." Grauermann didn't bother to look up, he didn't move the hand which shaded his eyes. He just said, quietly:

"Stand up."

Moke wondered if he'd heard properly. He'd been sitting for so many hours now that somehow he couldn't even imagine himself standing: he discussed the matter briefly with himself, muscle to muscle and pain to pain, and no sense came out of it. It didn't seem likely. What had standing up to do with it, in any case? How could it bear on the story of the picnic? He'd been fit enough *then*, he remembered, still fit from the holidays and week-ends he'd spent hiking, while Jean had gone to stay with her sister in London. Very unselfish of her, he'd often thought, to give up so much of her time to that lonely woman in a poky little flat. But he'd been fit, all right, when they went on the picnic, he and the girl. She'd been the first to tire! They'd taken a tram, first, all the way to the edge of the city, and then they'd walked for a few miles before they were offered a lift on a farm-cart. The lift hadn't lasted long, though, and soon, when the carter turned his horses away from the river, they were walking again, and in no time at all the girl said that she was tired and wanted a rest.

"Stand up!" The words were flung angrily at him

from the other side of the desk. Moke shook his head. He told the voice:

"She was so tired that we had to stop and rest. and you know, she was so much younger than I, and I'd been carrying the basket, not she. I couldn't understand it. If it'd been the other way round, well, then I could have understood, but——"

"Get up on your blasted feet and stop that infernal chatter!"

"Eh?" Moke stared at the darkness under the light, at the indistinct bulk with the furious voice. Something was out of touch, a slipping gear, a dirty contact. "You want *me* to stand up?" There was a movement from that darkness which was all that the room held except for the encircling brilliance of a million stabbing lights. Something of the darkness moved quickly, grew larger, taking yet more of the light's space into its own dark, and the voice bellowed with the harsh frenzy of a madman's scream:

"On your feet!" Something crashed hard and stinging across the left side of his face, and he felt himself slipping on the chair, but his shoulder and the upper part of the same arm was gripped: Grauermann dragged him up, and kicked the chair away with a sideways swing of his boot.

"Don't crouch there like a baboon—stand!" Was this standing? This agony in the bones, this burning which could have been a fire, indeed, in his limbs and chest and back, was this standing? Swinging loosely in the Russian's powerful grasp, he shook his head.

"Give me a moment . . . I'll be all right."

"You'll be all right, will you? Do you think I care if you're *all right* or not? I want the truth, that's all, and to get it I have to keep you awake. *Stand up*, damn you . . . straighten your knees, you cripple!"

Moke shook his head. It was the only part of him that moved freely and when he wanted it to. He told Grauermann:

"No. Fitter than she was, I tell you: really, for my age I——" Grauermann pushed him back so that he leant against the wall with his back on it and his knees still bent out, since he couldn't straighten them yet. Grauermann took his hands away slowly, holding them ready to catch the Englishman if he slipped. But Moke stood there propped against the wall with the light shining down hard into his filthy, battered face. His eyes, half-shut, gleamed sightlessly into Grauermann's.

"You'll be able to stand properly in a minute or two." Grauermann lowered himself into his chair, stared dispassionately at Moke. "Keep still for a bit, don't move, and you won't fall . . . Now let me warn you, Doncaster. The truth is what I want. Not lies. If you lie to me any more I will most certainly have you killed: whereas in the event of your telling me the truth—which incidentally I already know—well, we'd be happy to arrange for your release. A good, square meal or two first, eh? A nice hot bath and a good night's sleep in a feather bed. And all you need is to tell the truth. Isn't that worth it, eh?"

Moke's eyes, which had been large and surprisingly soft for the eyes of a man, now glinted like the mean eyes of a starving rat. They blinked quickly a

couple of times, and his tongue ran without effect over his dry, shapeless lips.

"Water. Just a little"

"You'll have water when you finish your story. Water and all the other nice things I've been telling you about. A shave and a haircut, too. But you'll get nothing of that sort before I get the truth." Graerman leant forward in his chair. He told Moke, softly: "And what you have now, as you are, is *luxury* compared to what you'll get if I have any more of your lies . . . understand?" The voice lost its threat, gained in persuasive power. "I'm only trying to help you, Doncaster. It's nothing to me personally if you go on lying so that we have to punish you. It makes no odds to *me*. I'm just trying to help you, to give you a little of my advice, because I've seen people in this gaol before who wouldn't listen to reason. . . . Now, tell me the truth. Don't let's waste any more of each other's time. Don't let's waste time, Doncaster. . . ."

Not waste time—that was what he'd said to the girl, when she'd said that she needed to rest. He'd noticed her glance at her watch, look up at him again as though she'd glanced at it to check on some appointment which he didn't know about, but he thought nothing of it and said, smiling, but impatient:

"It can't be far to go, surely? Let's wait until we get there, before we rest . . . I'll give you a hand."

Time—what did I know then about time? What did I know then of the meaning of an hour or four or

eight or twelve hours? Of time and light, this limit of hardness in light which was less flexible than case-hardened steel? What did I know of anything, yet I said: Don't let's waste time, and I smiled down at her where she'd dropped sitting on to the grass at the roadside, smiled down as though because I ~~was~~ older I knew more and could say, Don't waste time. I should have known that sitting on soft grass in fresh air could not possibly be a waste of time, that only in such circumstances a man could give himself time to look around and think: This is Now, my life, this is the world I live in and the air I breathe, this is myself alive and able to feel with pleasure the texture of the grass and the roughness of the earth which gives it life, gives life to the things I eat and see and love, and so gives life to me: this is the life which later when I am too old to be close to it I will be able to look back on and love in memory. How did the sky look? Blue, of course, but weren't there fine tracings of white cloud, weren't they moving slowly over that sky between me and it, weren't they worth watching for an hour? I don't remember now because I had no eyes for them, because I was thinking: *We are on our way to a place, and until we have got there there is no point in wasting time.* All of my life I have had my eyes on what was going to happen, on improvement and the avoidance of disaster, never on the present moment which is the life given to us for nothing, no charge at all except that of the effort of seeing and feeling. All my life I have been afraid of the future and nervous of the past. I have never known until now, when it is too late, the value of present life.

And now it *is* too late. How it is that I can (by biological standards only) be alive now is something which I cannot understand. It would have seemed impossible earlier that I could have survived this long. Yet my pulse beats, and quite often I can see; I feel hunger, and though things are not always clear I can also think. Perhaps none of it has been as bad as it ~~seemed~~ and seems; perhaps a stronger, more courageous man would not be surprised at the continuance of his endurance. Perhaps it is because I am and always have been a coward that I exaggerate the past and present horror. Perhaps what this Russian says is true, perhaps I have not yet really suffered: perhaps there is worse to come. After all, I am of very ordinary construction, it is not as though I had been reared in luxury or with great expectations. What did Charles say—pray, rather—alone at the time of his so-called trial, which was no more a trial or a form of justice than my own situation is at present? . . .

“Oh, my God, make me content to be overcome, when Thou wilt have it so.”

Fine, but easier for him, although he was a King and had never expected his own subjects to treat him like a mad dog. But easier for him because he knew his own right and his own strength, the very purpose of his death being the continuance of England and England's monarchy. He had led armies into battle, he had no doubt of his own courage. He knew that the manner of his death would be reflected in the hearts of his people from that day to the very end of England.

But I leave no witnesses, no monument, my tomb



will bear no mark. My murderers are not likely to be punished as Charles knew his would be: I will die alone and no history book will record the value or the manner of my death. For that, that I am weaker: for that, that my life has been of no importance and that my death will serve no purpose, arouse no emotion in any other: because I am a coward and cannot change it, for all that, I can borrow . . . He groped again for the words of the King. Like the feel of jewels under his fingertips he found them, found them intact and unchanged over three hundred years: forcing his eyes to narrow that dark blurr into the recognisable shape of Grauermann, he shaped the words carefully and said as clearly as he could:

*"I am not afraid of this business."*

"Hey! You're rambling! D'you want to be brought to your senses? Eh? D'you want a rubbing?"

Not Grauermann's voice. Grauermann, evidently, had handed over to Loskutov. Grauermann must have been too tired to carry on with the examination which had already lasted a whole day and was now stretching into the night. No food, no water. No rest.

"Well—d'you want me to kick some life into you?"

"No—thank you, I can . . . I'll go on." Darkness in light instead of light in darkness. Pain, dreadful pain, especially in the feet, which felt as though they had swollen and cracked. Moke begged:

"If I could sit——"

"Sit? Certainly. If you want to sit, why, sit! But

not until you've finished your story. And the truth, mind, not the stupid string of lies we had from you before! The truth—*then* you can sit."

. Majerle lay on his back and snored, close to the wall in the dark. He snored, but he wasn't sound asleep: there was something in him that stayed awake, something that had a voice and told him: Don't sleep, or you'll talk, you'll talk and the little Englishman isn't here to wake you up. He snored, and he saw La Housse, heard the Frenchman telling him: Hang on, you old Trotter, be a good boy so they'll let you out, give you a nice, comfy sentence: hang on, and I, your old pal Pierre, I will be there outside waiting for you! Only watch your mouth, not for your sake or mine, but for the thing which is greater than us all.

Close to Majerle, Studeny was far from sleep. Studeny listened to Majerle's snores, listened and tried to ignore them: he forced the concentration of his hearing to the faint irregularity of Slota's breathing. Studeny knew that his own time must necessarily be short: the very fact of his not having been called to interrogation for a week or more meant that his case was closed, perhaps submitted to higher authority for a rubber stamp. He wondered: Why do they bother? Why not call me out now and shoot me? My waiting and my anxiety gives them no advantage—why waste their bad bread on me, why wait? Slota's breath came suddenly in a short, hard gasp, and Studeny forgot his own personal predicament. He was

a doctor, a surgeon, his life while it lasted dedicated to the saving of other lives. He raised the Pole's head gently from its stone pillow, cradling it in the broad palm of his left hand, and with his right hand he felt for the beating of the heart. He withdrew that hand, raised it to his mouth and licked the back of it, then held it an inch from the dying man's mouth and nose. He felt the breath on the damp, tender skin, but only just, only a suggestion, a fraction more than the nothing which would be death. Studeny thought: In my own place, I could save him! With the knowledge and training and skill which is mine, if I had the drugs and the instruments, I could save this life! His mind burned and there was a new, frantic aching in his muscles, his mind which was tempered by discipline and by his own experience of suffering strained at the bonds of its sanity, so that he bit his lips to stop himself shouting, *I could save this life!* An alcoholic, craving for the absent bottle: a drug addict, screaming for the unobtainable needle: a soldier with a jammed machine-gun: a surgeon with unnecessary death under his knowing hands. He told himself: For this I was born and allowed to live, trained and taught, and this one who will die in ten minutes' time, this now is my defeat. These hands are useless and this brain of mine is an encumbrance: this is the moment which I have always denied existed, this is the furnace and the proud tapping of a cloven hoof.

How often he had said, seeking to lend his strength to others who seemed in need of it: There is no limit. That a man could never say: This is the end. How wrong he'd been, how blind, how false in

self-confidence founded on a superficial experience. For here in the palm of his hand was a man's head, and because it was dying the feel of it against his palm was enough to mock his life's work and make less than nothing of his faith.

Gently he lowered Slota's head to the floor, and withdrew his hand. He bent his own forehead to the stones so that his right ear brushed the ear of the dying Pole, and he called in silence from the filth and through the dark God, have You surrendered too? Did Your son die for ever, when He died?

As though in answer, the light struck down into the cell. Majerle's snoring ceased abruptly: he sat up, stared quickly, suspiciously about him. He asked Studeny:

"What goes on? Was I talking while I slept?" Studeny shrugged his shoulders. He resented the light and Majerle in one swift hate of the moment.

"Why? Have you anything worth saying?" They heard the bolt sliding, and Toivo's shoulder came in close behind the door swinging back, his shoulder just under the white B2 which was like a brand in their eyes and on their brains. Toivo glared into the cell, then turned his head and jerked an arm, beckoning to the empty corridor.

"In. In with you!" He muttered, "No end to 'em. Get rid of one, and he's gone, and here's another on his heels. No end." He put one huge hand flat between Pierre La Housse's shoulder-blades and pushed. The Frenchman stumbled blindly into the cell, and Toivo dragged the door shut behind him. The lights stayed on.

Studený greeted him. "Welcome. A new face is always welcome." The words were designed by long habit to excuse or disguise the inspection, the swift, but comprehensive summing-up. Studený didn't like what he saw, but it interested him. There was something about it that was at once aggressive and broken. La Housse glanced quickly, disinterestedly at Studený, then at Majerle who had raised himself against the wall and now sat silent, staring in blank astonishment and horror which through the heavy growth of hair on his face was only blankness so far as anyone could see. Inside there was nothing blank, only the sharpness of horror. For the first time, the unforgivable had been allowed to happen. For him to have slipped (and stupidly, carelessly, through over-confidence and through no efforts of the opposition) was bad enough: for La Housse to have been caught in the same net was not only inexcusable but unbelievable. It was not possible: it could not happen. There was no allowance for it. This had to be untrue, a nightmare induced, perhaps, by the constant fear of torture: *it couldn't be!* To prove it to himself, and at the same time for an assessment of the position (because he knew that this was fact, that this was both of them, two failures in the one thing which neither of them would ever reckon by the poor standards of their own personal living and dying) he asked, abruptly:

"Who the hell are you?"

Only a barely perceptible tightening at the corners of his eyes, a muscular reaction lasting for less than a second, only this betrayed La Housse's sudden shock

of recognition. Nothing else, and his face relaxed into its fearful, beaten experience of strange sensation. Certainly Studeny had seen nothing: aware of his own defeat which was spread beside him on the stones, feeling this as a dream or as a temporary lapse which must be covered, not from others who could not in any case plumb its depths, but from himself for now and ever blotted out, he smiled at the undecided stranger and waved his hand at the corner on his left, on the other side of Slota . . . Slota, or Slota's body? What difference if at this moment it was a man or a corpse? A matter of minutes in the face of eternity. Studeny flashed in his reeling mind, what have I looked to all my life, in the one thing and the other? As the intelligence of an animal has its limits, a dividing line between intelligence and intellect, so have we men a limit to our own minds, and I can see it: we are bound in a stupid optimism, blind faith, a ridiculous trust in the prevalence of Good! If it were so, if there were, indeed, an assured triumph of Good over Evil, would the struggle have lasted for so long with so much continued advantage in the hand of Evil? In one form or another, Evil is always with us, and has always been more virulent than the Good, which has to be forced into the hearts of people while the Evil moves fast and scaring like fire in dry timber. The Good is faced with stupendous, overwhelming Evil, and the Good which is our safeguard is riddled and encompassed with its own weakness. If the two powers were not close to a balance, why should there have been war in heaven? Was that war not decided at the expense of our human world; are we

here part of the major strategy or have we been given over to the other side? Lost territory, and ourselves the doomed, forgotten rearguard. . . . Studeny waved his hand towards the corner on his left.

"We have this corner seat vacant, my friend. Please take it." La Housse looked at him and at the Pole's fragile length beside him. His eyes flickered between the two and returned to answer Majerle's question.

"You ask me who I am. Sir, my name is La Housse. I am from France, and I am here under sentence of death on a charge of espionage." Pierre nodded at his friend. The nod said, that's for you, you can take that as fact and work on it or use it, if you're in a position to work on or use anything. He raised his eyebrows briefly over the hard tight emergency of his face, and that told Trotter, now I want the same from you. He looked at Studeny, and asked: "And you, gentlemen? My confession for yours?" Studeny laughed.

"I'm a misfit, that's about all. My name's Studeny, this is my country—or it was. I was never cut out to be occupied by the ideas of foreigners. So I was wrong not to be a nazi, and I'm a criminal because I'm not a communist. They say I'm a saboteur, an organiser of revolt, a fascist, a reactionary, that I'm politically unsound. No doubt I, too, am under sentence of death, only they haven't told me yet." Studeny jerked his head, indicating Trotter. "Your turn, Majerle."

La Housse looked quickly, intently at Trotter. He'd listened politely to Studeny's account of himself.

Under different circumstances he'd have been interested. Now he looked hard at Trotter, a man he'd worked with and drunk with and talked with, a man he knew, and he asked: "And you, sir?" Trotter nodded. He told his friend, the man on whom his hopes had been stuck fast in old unshakable faith:

"I am a Yugoslav. My name is Steven Majerle. I am a dealer in unobtainable goods. An operator of the black market. It is a mistake that I am here, and doubtless I shall soon be directed to more suitable quarters. I should never have been sent here, but apparently all foreigners are suspected of being spies or agents. Anyway of more far-reaching crimes than that of peddling."

"And what did you peddle?" The Frenchman let Studeny see his expression of contempt. "Silk stockings? Rubber goods?"

Trotter nodded. "I started with such simplicities, but then I was introduced to firearms. The market was narrower, more concentrated, and the commission higher. . . . But I should've stuck to the simple luxuries. Cosmetics, and such rubbish. Toilet paper . . ."

La Housse watched him. He was wondering. Is it true? Is there no catch? Surely you tell this story because you distrust that elderly, rather crazy-looking gentleman, surely you are not held here on such an unimportant, temporary affair? It would be too much to think that Harry Trotter at last in a soviet gao! should be listed only as a spiv! It would be a joke worth telling in certain quarters! He told himself: It can't be true, don't let yourself believe it. What you



saw when your eyes fell on him is the truth, it's the two of us for the highest leap man ever makes. He told Studeny:

"Thank you for your offer. But I have a dislike of corners, a form of claustrophobia, perhaps. If I might sit instead between you, between you, sir, and this gentleman——?" Trotter edged sideways to increase the gap between Studeny and himself. He said:

"Sit where you will." Studeny repeated, nodding agreement:

"Where you will." La Housse thought: It is of importance to them, this show of what could be called hospitality, this observance of formality, the mutual unobtrusive consultation before agreement. The old one said: Sit here, on my left, because he could not inflict by his own volition the close presence of the stranger on this other one, this Trotter whom he calls Majerle. And when I said: Between you, both of them signified their assent, neither of them overriding the other. I suppose that under conditions such as these, when men are forced into the state of animals, the wise ones such as these two become more formal and more considerate of each other's divergent opinions and attitudes. People laugh at the joke of an Englishman who was wrecked on a desert island and still insisted on changing into formal attire for the evening meal: here it becomes plain that the Englishman was actuated more by sense than by convention. He knew what he was doing.

"Thank you." He sat down carefully between them, with his back against the wall. The floor was hard and cold in its dampness. He asked Studeny:

"He sleeps, that other one?" His glance crossed Studeny's knees to the straight and silent Pole. At once in Studeny's eyes he recognised his own blunder, and before Studeny could summon an answer the Frenchman added: "I beg your pardon. I——"

Studeny thought: He's part of our rearguard, after all. Unpleasantly disguised, but still with us. He thought: I was wrong. One break, and a man can't trust his judgment. He told the Frenchman:

"Beg no man's pardon. This one here—you're right—but no man has anything worth another man's begging."

Studeny slumped and dozed, and while there was still wariness in his mind he thought: These are their methods, in this way they treat human beings. In other countries it would be a criminal offence to treat an animal as men are treated here in the school of antichrist. Can there be a compromise on any terms, can democracy, normality, negotiate a settlement with *this* order? Any more than the Allies, looking back now on the start of the last war, can imagine themselves as having been able to live side by side with the mass torture and extermination of Jews? Well, they tried to, for a year or so, but even in the blind pursuit of 'Peace at Anybody's Cost' they found they couldn't take it. They found that it held in its own filth a danger to themselves, so they raised their banners high and they yelled, God for freedom, England and the Jews!

Well, he thought, drowsing, we shouldn't com-

plain. We who were left alive in the camps were saved by the power of their battle-cry. We shouldn't look too hard for motive, because it was, indeed, their common people's motive, and it saved us. In any case, would we have gone to war for England's sake; can we blame her for waiting a few months before she gave her young men for the vain cause of safety and freedom in Europe? •

Studený dozed, and he saw in his sleep the inside of the extermination camp, he saw the dreadful starved and riddled bodies, and he smelt the leaking eddies of the gas. None of it was any worse than this. It sprang from the same authority, the same foul aspirations: only now it was more artificial than racial, it wasn't only Jews. He thought: Should I be glad of that? And he slept.

Majerle whispered: "On what charge?"

"The obvious one. As I said. They know me, they have proof, there's no doubt. And you? As you said? They only think that you——"

"Sure. I'm just a spiv to those boys. I'll be out soon, Press-On, out and away. But—what about the goods? They got them, too? Look, I'm not blaming, I slipped myself, I'm not bloody well probing. Is there any——" La Housse laid his hand on the Canadian's knee. He stared with real happiness into the wide, troubled eyes, and in his heart he said: God, thank You. Thank You for the chance, the second chance which means a hope. . . .

"Harry. You know Litnys, the village on the edge

of the Labe valley, about halfway up to Mělník? The sugar village? There's a church. Listen, Harry. The cushions on which the people kneel are all of the same colour, all red. Except one. Perhaps more than one, but not enough in any case to present difficulty. There can't be many like it——"

"Like what, damn it! Quick!"

"One is not red. Blue, and a fleur-de-lis in silver. In that blue one I stuffed all the paper in small rolls. You understand?"

"Sure." Calmness and whispers in an excitement fit for yelling, a triumph needing for its background the sudden blare of trumpets. Blue, and a fleur-de-lis, that was what mattered now, that was the sign of hope exalted on the crushed remains of despair. This was the job unfinished! La Housse whispered, with one eye on Studeny:

"You're sure they've nothing on you? That you won't be watched when you're out?" Trotter nodded.

"Certain. And when I'm out they won't see me even if they watch." He looked hard at La Housse, and he knew what he was saying. He was giving benediction or at any rate its peace to a man who'd die happy with it. At any rate, happier for it: die in agony without it. A man who knew that his job was not just a job, but a Cause: a man who had never believed in prayer but whose life, hard and irreligious as it had been, was itself a prayer.

"Sure, Press-On. I tell you, it's in the bag. I give you my word, so help me."

The Frenchman relaxed against the wall. It was all over now, the rest was a formality. A difficult

engagement which would soon be over, too. He'd passed on the thing that mattered, the thing his life had been *for*. There wasn't a thing he could do now, except wait and take the other thing which he'd accepted in his mind when he'd started. He was ready for it. He told Trotter:

"Be careful. They're looking for you—for a man called Trotter. They know of his existence. They've—asked me—about him. Naturally, I had never heard of him." Trotter grinned.

"Naturally. You old crap, you . . . nor have I heard of him. Not ever." The lights were still beating down out of the wire cages in the ceiling, and Trotter thought: Toivo never made a mistake of that sort. There'll be another call, soon. He looked at La Housse, and he thought: It'll be for you. He muttered:

"Better get some sleep, huh?"

Loskutov slapped him hard across the mouth. He held his hand back for a moment of pleasurable anticipation, then slapped again.

"If I can't keep you awake any other way, you filth, I'll give you a spell on the Lastochka. You'd like that, wouldn't you, eh? Wouldn't you?"

"No. Not——" Moke spoke to the nebulous cloud close in front of his eyes. "Not that, rather . . . Please I can't help it, I'm trying——"

"Try much harder. My patience won't last for ever." Loskutov went back to his chair. He was tired himself, but the act of striking had done him good. He didn't want to send this bag of bones down to the ropes, because in its present state it might easily kill it. But somehow the result had to be achieved, and if necessary——

"Talk. Don't dribble at me: talk!"

He said to the girl: "Don't let's waste time", and she looked at her watch as though the minutes mattered.

"All right. It is up this path. Up through those trees—to the top of the ridge. It is a climb, that is why I wanted a moment rest." He looked up in the direction of her pointing arm and finger, and he said:

"Doesn't look so bad . . . what does the notice say?"

"Notice? What is 'notice'?"

"That board. Look, there. What does it say?" He thought: If this was England, it'd read, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted, By Order'. He'd often wondered by whose Order. She laughed. •

"That! It says: 'These trees are the property of the people, and persons causing damage to them will be held responsible'." She walked a few yards up the track, and touched one of the trees with the palm of her left hand.

"I am the people," she said. "So this is my tree. What the notice means is that when it is fully grown up it will be for the government to dispose. Now it stands and it is mine, I can put my arms round it and call it mine." She hugged herself against the round, rough trunk, and she spoke to it: "Hello, tree. You're mine, until they need you." He thought: The same for me, the same goes for me, only I can't say it. The trees thickened on either side of the dry dirt path, and he noticed tracks dug deep and hard into the ground. Tractors, perhaps, only wider than that—almost like the paths left by tanks, paths that he'd seen scarring the Downs when the Army had a training depot near the school, during the war. He asked her, pointing down at them:

"Tanks? Tractors?" For a moment she seemed embarrassed by the question, then she looked down at the ridged, wide indentations and she told him:

"It is the agriculture machines. We are most up-to-date with these apparatus. I often wonder how the

peasants have changed so easily from horses to machines." She was walking in one of the tracks where the earth was harder and easier than the loose dust. She said: "Marks of the hoof are nicer. I would rather talk to a horse than to a tractor." He didn't take it as a joke. He moved the basket from his right hand to his left, and answered:

"I'd be no good with either. My father disliked me because I didn't inherit his own love of horses—I think he liked them more than he liked people—and now I'm out of date because I have no knowledge of engines. Perhaps that's why I've always rather liked walking . . . aren't we nearly there?"

"Soon. You can see the ridge, there to the left. Behind those trees in front there is a bend in this way, you will soon see. Why did your father like horses more than people?" He stepped down into the other track so that he was walking beside her instead of ahead of her. It never occurred to him that he was being kept busy talking.

"I don't know. He was lucky though, luckier than I've been. I've never got on much with people either, and I've not had his outlet . . . But there was a dog that I was rather fond of." He paused, and added: "That didn't work either."

She asked him, "Why?" and he thought: I'm talking an awful lot about myself. I never did it before. Why should I now, why should this girl half of my age get into my thoughts and tear them out so easily?

"He lost an eye, one day. A thorn. The vet saved the eye, kept it in, that is, and it was a tricky business



because the thorn had worked right in and started an abscess. If the poison had got into his brain, he'd have died. But my wife nursed him and he got over it. She hardly left him, fed him out of a spoon and sat in the dark with him for a week. And he got better."

"I thought you were going to tell me that he died." They were coming up to the bend, but he was only walking along in the tank's track, feeling the weight of the basket in his hand and the hard earth under his boots, and remembering the dog.

"No. After he was sick, he forgot things, somehow. He started messing in the house, on the carpets. We couldn't stop it. He'd been so easy to train as a puppy, but—I don't know, it'd done something to him . . ." Moke glanced sideways at the girl. He said, apologetically: "Couldn't have the house stinking." He stopped, because she was on the outer track of the path's bend, and he waited until they were level and could walk again side by side, ten feet apart. She asked him, looking quickly upwards and to her right through the trees (scaredly, as though she was expecting a landslide or some other phenomenon frightening enough to give that jerk to her head, that sideways light to her eyes):

"Couldn't you have kept him outside?" He looked at her, shocked, hearing his wife ask the same question, hearing her say:

"The filthy thing ought to be kept outside. Get a kennel, Jim. Couldn't the school carpenter make one for us? I tell you, I can't have this any longer!"

He told the girl: "No. He—no. It wouldn't have worked." He thought: Not unless I'd gone to live in

the kennel with him. The other way was easier for the dog, he didn't know a thing about it. Only *I* felt it, and I had to keep telling myself—rightly, of course—a dog's a dog, and there's a limit to what you can put up with from a dog. She's right, there's a limit.

"No," he said. "It was better for him to be put down. Not that I wanted——"

"This is the place." She took hold of his arm, he felt her there close to him and she pointed down at the falling countryside. "Here we are. Was it not worth the while?"

"Eh?" That terrier, when he was half-grown, had a special way of crossing a field of long grass, corn or kale. He'd run a few dozen yards, then stand up on his hind legs with his eyes just over the surface of the crop: he'd get his bearings, then drop down out of sight and tear on by dead reckoning until he reckoned it was time for another set of bearings.

"Here is where we were coming. Shall we stop in this place?" Judging by the impatient look in her face, she'd said it before.

"Sorry. I was—oh. What a splendid view! . . . You must be hungry."

"And thirsty." She took the basket from him, and pulled out the bottle of wine wrapped in its wet towel. She unrolled the towel and handed him the bottle.

"It's still quite cold. Here—" He took the corkscrew from her. Down below the hill the plain was flat, unbroken. Except—he looked harder, narrowing his eyes. "Isn't that a camp?" She was busy, delving into the basket.

"A what?" But certainly it was. A soldiers' camp,

huts and tents and other rows of vehicles. Tanks. Down in the valley he saw the camp and he saw movement, too, a long, thick column of khaki filling a lane which skirted the hill's base. He turned to the girl.

"Look. I'm sure we ought not to be here. Some sort of manœuvres, or something—look!" He was surprised at her reaction. Instead of answering, she grabbed the bottle out of his hands, and he found himself holding something else. A pair of field-glasses.

"What? The wine—why——!" She flung herself against him, fighting at him although he wasn't fighting, himself, and she screamed like she was hurt or frightened to death. In a tongue which he didn't understand any more than to recognise it as Czech she yelled, struggling at him, clawing and screaming, and close behind a male voice bellowed in answer. A whistle shrilled from the edge of the trees.

The two soldiers came running, flung themselves on him, pinning him to the ground. A small man in a crumpled civilian suit stared down at him. Where'd they all come from, why? The man spoke to him in English, ignoring the girl's constant weeping and the babble of her voice.

"You are a prisoner, arrest! Here is prohibit place, military." He bent, and picked up the binoculars. "So! And a camera, too!" Well, there it was, lying on the grass beside him. He'd never seen it before, it wasn't his and never had been. The small man growled: "Filthy spy. English . . ." He bent down, and it was the first time since he'd had to take up

boxing at school, when he was twelve, that Moke had been struck in the face. Between the blows which the unshaven, plain-clothes man dealt him, Moke heard the girl crying and he saw her face downwards on the grass. She lay a dozen feet away, and while the soldiers held him in a sitting position and the small man slapped him, he heard and noticed her noisy, savage sobbing.

"Naturally," growled Loskutov. "Naturally she cried. But a filthy, callous, fascist like yourself wouldn't understand that from a simple, decent girl. Would you, you lying, lousy spy? *Would* you? But don't worry, I'll teach you. I'll get some sense out of you if I have to break you into small pieces to find it. Like this, for a start——" he gripped Moke's nose between the knuckles of his first and second fingers, and twisted hard, twisting and pulling. "Like this." He let go of Moke's nose, and stepped back. "Now, sit down."

"Sit?"

Loskutov put his face down close to Moke's, and shouted:

"Sit! On your own. If I have to help you, I'll break your blasted back. Sit!"

It wasn't easy. Moke groped around for the chair, but it was out of his reach. Loskutov cursed, and flung it against his legs so that although he couldn't see it he could feel it there and get a hand on it, and then, taking the movement slowly and sliding down on to the chair with his back steadied sliding down against the wall, sit. The pain burned chiefly in his

bent knees, yet his feet didn't feel as though there was any less weight on them.

"You could call that sitting, I dare say." Loskutov chuckled. "Like a monkey in a fair, sitting on a pole. . . . You're not a man any more, you're a monkey. Like me to hurt you a bit?" Moke screamed as the huge hands grasped his ears, he screamed before the pain even started.

"You're not happy? Not comfortable, you louse? Not even after getting all those lies off your chest? Eh?"

"Not lies." Moke's tongue was thick, it filled his mouth and restricted his breathing. "Really. Told you the truth, all I know I told you, please." He felt something happening to his face, something new, of his muscles' doing: it was his mouth opening and all his face tightening like a child's. Loskutov, surprised, saw the mouth open like a broad gash from a hatchet, saw the tears streaming and heard the loud, pumping sobs. Moke had no control over what his face was doing, over the painful sobbing or his twisting hands. He was not thinking, I am hurt, being hurt, I am hungrier than I have ever been and thirstier than I ever thought to be. I have had no rest for twenty-four hours. He was not thinking: For a day and a night I have faced the light, so that now I can't see it any more except as a cancer under my eyes, where I suppose the nerves are. He was not thinking: This is about it, this is where they get what they want and that's the end for me. He was not thinking anything except that there was something else than this, something behind it all, something which he had known

in his mind for many years and recognised and held high in the floodlight of his imagination as a brilliant standard to contrast with his own known weakness: a set-piece, a vision which had always told him: You, you, too, must some day have a test, a peak of trial, a time from which there can be no withdrawal or side-stepping, a time when all the world can see your answer to the challenge. Life with its small fears had been too easy, there had always been coming a moment like this when they could look in on the shrouded centre and demand an answer: Are you a Briton, have you in your veins the blood of Scotland's history? The curtains fell apart and he saw the King, pale and stern-faced, darkly clothed in the centre of that scarlet square of murder, the madman's flunkies: the weary look had gone from his face, there was no weakness now in his stern, contemptuous eyes, and for the first time in his life he spoke without a stammer.

„*I am not afraid of this business.*”

“We'll see about that!” Loskutov jerked the door open, and stuck his head out into the passage.

“Toivo! Hey, Toivo!” (From the gallery a woman cried, clear and fearless over the ironclad heads:

“God save your Majesty!” and from the barriers at the back of the hall the common people echoed in the power of their number: “God save the King!” The soldiers rattled their muskets and roared to order: “Down with the tyrant!”, and the tyrant stood

alone, pale and straight, and honoured not only by God but also by the slow, surly loyalty of the London mob. One of the judges, one called Downes, exclaimed:

"Have we hearts of stone? Are we men?" And yet another, who had been a cobbler and was now a Colonel, ran heavily from the scarlet-draped benches and spat in his Monarch's face. The King, touching at his face with the edge of his handkerchief, spoke evenly, quietly in the tense, shocked hall.

"God hath justice, sir, in store for you and me." ).

"Can't be in two places at once, one at a time. What is it?" Toivo stared belligerently at Loskutov. He jerked his head sideways at Moke, who sat dreaming silently on the hard, wooden chair. "Want this put back in its box?"

"Certainly not. Bring a bucket of water, you offensive wretch, and wake it up. Hurry." Loskutov lolled in his chair until Toivo came back with the bucket. Toivo looked at him, enquiringly, and when Loskutov nodded Toivo poured the brownish, smelling water slowly over the Englishman's head. Moke looked up, blinking the lids over his caked and sightless eyes, and his tongue came out, licking at the dirty water as it coursed down around his nose and soaked into the hair on his face. The hair of his head, long as a woman's, hung limp and straight from the bald centre of his crown.

"Better?" Loskutov smiled, like a vicar smiling at a wayward parishioner. "All right, Toivo, that's

all for now. But I may need you again, soon." He asked Moke: "Better? Some facts, now?" Moke stared at the voice. He said:

"I am an Englishman. I'm not a spy, I'm a school-master. You've no right——"

"Shut your face. There's no question of Right, and I don't give a damn if you're English or Japanese. I want facts. Listen to me, don't go back to sleep. I'm going to get what I want and I'm going to get it *now*. One way or another. Let me tell you . . . first, we can pull all your hair out, with pincers. Then we can draw your nails. Easy to do, and they look all right afterwards, they grow again, in time." Loskutov grinned to himself. It was the new policy, to make double use of a prisoner. Send them back to the West with no evidence showing, nothing that could be seen or photographed for the world to see. Send them back with no evidence of physical damage, but with real horror and fear which they could impart to others. Spread fear. The soviet had nothing to lose—enough of the truth of their methods came out anyway in newspaper reports and in other ways, so why not trade on it, why not prey on the latent cowardice of weak people and bring the fear out to undermine loyalty? To a man like Loskutov, to the thousands of his kind who had learned their lessons more thoroughly and their trade more scientifically than any of the Gestapo ever did, there was never the thought that Time, which was a healer, was also a corrector and a judge, that in time, as Hitler's minions discovered, murder was paid for at the end of a rope. Russia was so vast and the machinery of



the soviet so huge that they could never imagine its depths being probed by justice or by revenge. Their minds worked within the limits set by the machine which gave them life. When it came, they wouldn't understand the reason or the justice.

Loskutov asked Moke: "You going to talk?"

"I've told you. There's nothing else, really——"

"Lies!" The Russian's voice rose, and he trembled in easy, pleasant rage. "Lies!" His fist crashed down on the boxboard desk. "It's all lies and soon I'm going to teach you to tell the truth!" He gave himself a cigarette, and with the smoke curling out of the corners of his hard, trap mouth he spoke quietly, gently:

"Doncaster. You were arrested in a prohibited area, a military zone, and you had with you a camera with a telephoto lens. That's fact. The camera is in this very building with your other effects, which included a pair of field-glasses, a detailed military map obviously compiled by British Intelligence, and a compass. Nothing in it, eh?"

"They weren't mine. She——"

"Rubbish. Now, look. You've already confessed to the following charges. One—that you were hired to work at the so-called British Council as a spy. Two—that you deliberately insinuated yourself upon this simple young woman, intending to use her as a cover for your espionage activities, apart from your more personal and physical intentions. All that's down in black and white, recorded: you can't change it. Doncaster, I'm a simple man. I have a job to do, and that's to get the truth. Do I have to have you

torn apart to finish the story? Eh? When we've enough out of your own mouth already to sentence you, do we have to use methods which we naturally detest to get the end of it? Do you want to die, in some undeniable discomfort, or can we get this over with quickly and send you home?"

"If I admit it you'll kill me anyway. You only want——"

"Really! And why should I want to kill you? Couldn't I have done that anyway and forged your signature? Don't be silly, don't make it harder for yourself. It's all straightforward, Doncaster, you were there taking photographs—we developed the ones in your camera, by the way—all that picnic stuff was a blind, only we aren't such fools as you thought, we'd had our eyes on you for some time. . . . Now, you'll admit it, eh?"

"I've told you the truth. The girl——"

"Doncaster, have you heard about the Lastochka? The Swallow?"

"No!" He moved, jerked physically at the mental picture which the word gave him. "Yes, I've heard, and you showed me . . ." He cringed in his chair in his own darkness and terror, and the Russian smiled to see it. It made things easy.

"Of course. We showed you that stupid Pole, didn't we, after he'd had a day of it. Well, then, do you want the same treatment?"

"No, please——" That frightful picture represented his idea of the limit, that arched, helpless figure strung up by ropes from ankles and wrists tied together behind it, slung from a pulley in the ceiling

of the punishment cell: it twisted slowly on the ropes' creaking tension with the light from the open door falling on it as it revolved, deadweight, carrion, nothing human in its strained unnatural agony.

"Then you'll sign." In Loskutov's statement was finality, a purpose achieved. It was a matter of repetition, this job—one case after another, and in the end they all broke, not one of them individually was of interest, only in the sum total they represented the job's steady accomplishment. The fingers of his right hand smoothed the surface of the final page of this Doncaster case, and his eyes saw only the space at its foot, the space which waited only for a signature. Moke's signature. Loskutov might have been a salesman among his ranks of shiny cars, the paper here a hire-purchase agreement. Only this now was one thing or the other, a signature, or no signature: there was no time, no option, no easy-payments plan. A signing or no signing: one was death, the other the Lastochka and other things besides, and all of them leading in any case to the same answer. In Loskutov's tone there was no doubt. He whisked the yellow paper around and dropped the pen across it.

"You can't see properly, I don't suppose. I'll hold your hand, eh? You want to sign it, don't you?" Moke didn't answer, there was something about him that was removed, out of touch with bribes and threats, some sudden distance between himself and his sharp fear of the past moment. Loskutov's mind still smiled from the obvious success of his threat, this Doncaster's plain surrender, yet the smile flattened

now and his irritation rose to meet the Englishman's unexpected quiet.

"Or do you want the Lastochka? . . . You know, it's so much easier to write your name. Here, on this paper. You saw how the Pole looked, eh? Sign, or you'll be there too, just like he was, and we'll bring the others along to take a peep and the lesson you learnt. At least, I hope you learnt it. We don't like to see people, even spies, just *falling apart*. So much more simple for them to sign . . . And after you've signed, Doncaster, a nice long sleep. Only I'm afraid we'll have to disturb you before long, because you'll need a shave and a haircut; we'll have to teach you how to eat a decent meal! But that won't be so bad, will it? . . . All we need is your signature."

Why any dilemma? There was the signature and then possibly death, or possibly it was true, all this talk, possibly from him all that they wanted was a signature and then they'd turn him out free: on the other side there was undoubtedly pain, enormous and suffocating pain, something not to be dreamt of or thought about, something beyond what the mind and body was built to stand, and then after it, without any doubt at all, death. . . . Why hesitate in the choice? In the first there was a chance of life, but that was small, that chance, it wasn't likely to be anything but a form of bribe which would not have to be fulfilled once they had what they wanted: in any case, there would be no pain, there would be an end to this hell, this pain and fear of more. What was it, this doubt? Shouldn't the course be obvious, especially for a man who was—well, weak? Nobody'd be sur-

prised, they'd be expecting it. . . . Well, what was it, this other something? Look, Moke, tell him Yes, say you'll sign, say it and it's over, one way or another—well? Still something else? Lights rising here against failed and hurting eyes, *there* more dim in the great hall's crowded depth with the King's quiet courage in their minds while they sentence and vilify him over and over again to justify their long-planned act of murder, and the King himself in another place with a child, his child, upon his knee, the King speaking to this the youngest of his sons, who only nine years earlier had looked his first upon the world, upon his father's England: the King, his father, telling him carefully and slowly: "Sweetheart, now they will cut off thy father's head . . . so long as your brothers Charles and James do live, do not be made a King by them." The boy with only nine years of life behind him, but with the blood of a king in his veins and the courage of a Stuart in his heart, looks up into the stern sadness of his father's eyes, and his answer is a greater one than ever came before or since from any child: *I will be torn in pieces first!*

"Here!" said Loskutov. "Here, I'll steady your hand. Sign." Moke felt the hand on his and the thick wooden pen thrust into his fingers and someone moving his fingers so that they held the pen, he felt that and the paper under his hand, it moved when his hand, resting on it, jerked in uncontrollable reaction to the feel of them all, he heard the loud, confident order, "Sign!" Yet his hand stayed rigid in the

other's fist, there were no ropes and there remained no fear in his clouded vision. He shouted loudly, tearing at the screen of his own blindness and helplessness, he struggled almost physically and certainly consciously to emerge from the old fetters of his natural accustomed fear into a new courage terrifying in its own inescapable effect:

"I will be torn in pieces first!"

"Certainly you will. Certainly." Loskutov stared at him in cold, unmoving fury. "You will, indeed." He stared at the Englishman and he told him from a distance, hating him too strongly to touch him with his own fists or boots: "I'll see you break, I'll see you kiss my toes and beg for a bullet in the head." Feeling sick with the power of his loathing, feeling the pale sickness right in his own stomach and watching the verminous, disgusting creature which should by now have no mind of its own and yet had the insolence—the utter stupidity!—to hold out against an overwhelming, flattening power, he said almost gently, "Yes. We'll tear you up, since you've asked for it, and afterwards you'll *beg* to be allowed to sign." Loskutov jerked the door open, and his fury screamed into the empty corridor:

"Toivo! Toivo, you miserable, senseless ape! Hey, Toivo! Come and take this . . . You, Toivo! Here! Lastochka! D'you hear there? Lastochka!"

"Save your breath." Kapanen's tall, pale figure showed itself unexpectedly around a quietly opening door farther down the passage. "The Colonel's sent

that ape down to B2, to bring up a new prisoner. No good yelling for him, Nikki, he's busy . . . But *I'm* free—want a hand? Something about a Lastochka?" He smiled, like an ordinary man picking up a suggestion of a visit to a bar. He asked: "Didn't I hear you mention the Lastochka?"

Loskutov nodded. "*Spasibo*. The Englishman here, this thing called Doncaster. Coming?"

Kapanen grinned. He shut the door of his own room, and three long strides took him to Loskutov in the doorway. "The Englishman, eh? It'll be a pleasure. . . . You know, Nikolai Pyotrovitch, this place is becoming like a United Nations, wherever you look. The new one is a Frenchman!"

Loskutov paused beside Moke's slumped, drooling wreck. "What new one?"

"I told you. That ullage Toivo has just gone down for him. He's a spy, a Frenchman. No trouble for us—all straightforward, the Colonel's ordered a shooting party for this morning." He glanced shrewdly at his friend. "You look as if you'd been up all night." Loskutov jerked his head, indicating Moke.

"I have. With *this* rubbish. And all no bloody use, like talking to a savage!" Kapanen saw the jerking muscle in his friend's face, and he interrupted:

"Steady. Easy, Nikki. Don't take it to heart. The Lastochka'll fix it for you, eh?"

"Yes. You're right." Loskutov grabbed a fistful of Moke's hair, jerked the Englishman's head back against the wall. Moke smiled at the ceiling, and muttered:

"Thank you. Only for a moment, I'll be all right, really . . ." Kapanen's eyes widened.

"*Chyort!* It'll kill him, you know. Look, he's half done now, that Lastochka'll finish him! Are you sure—?" Loskutov couldn't take his eyes off Moke. There was an almost personal vehemence in the strength of his dislike. He said, not looking up at Kapanen:

"All right. Perhaps it will." He chuckled, still with his eyes on Moke. "Perhaps it will, and perhaps it won't. Let's see." He stepped round to the other side of the chair, and each of them took one of the Englishman's arms: together they half-helped and half-dragged him to his feet and to the door, out of that door into the wide, cold passage, and Loskutov muttered as he shouldered his half of the weight:

"Now, we'll see! Now!"



STUDENY woke slowly under the lights' brilliant glare. He glanced to his right and saw that both the newcomer and Majerle were sound asleep, Majerle snoring as usual with his mouth open, a pink gap edged with yellowish teeth right in the middle of the growth of heavy black hair which covered his face. Like a monkey, thought Studeny, a powerful monkey with a brain, and there's something particularly odd about that one because, although he obviously possesses brain and thought to a comparatively high degree, he insists on showing only a boorish, down-to-earth and matter-of-fact abruptness of manner and conversation. Studeny had no doubt at all that Majerle was something other than he set out to represent. But that was Majerle's secret, nobody else's, and Studeny's thoughts and theories about it only served to pass the time and to take his own mind off the more personal and forbidding aspects of his own present situation and probable future. If Majerle had said to him, *I'll tell you*, Studeny would have listened and wanted to hear, but at the same time he'd have been disappointed, because afterwards there'd be something less to think about, only in its place another set of facts, hard and rigid truth. Here, fantasy and imagination were easier and more palatable than facts. There was enough that was plain,

here in these very stones, in the glare of light and the way it shone on the Pole's sprawled body. Easier to dream and imagine. These stones, this place—does a place and do the parts of which it is constructed, stones, and beams of wood, and iron bars, do they take into themselves the environment and the lives and deaths and pain, do they hear and remember the cries and the thoughts and feelings, can they in their cold detachment soak up some vestige of the purpose to which they have been put? Do our souls, torn from our bodies here upon them, under them and between their blank, vertical rounded faces, take from us into these walls some articulate indestructible record of our lives here with them? When time passes and this spasm of its disease goes with it, when it passes in another war and this place becomes a hospital, a first-aid station, will some poor wretch under the anæsthetic scream for something other than his own pain dulled by the injected drug, and the doctors think, how can this be, how can this man or this woman with the mind and body rendered senseless by a scientific process proved and tried, how can this body writhe and the mind feel hurt enough to scream?—and the surgeon himself perhaps tremble at a brief second's glimpse of the knife in his own skilled hand? And later this place could become a restaurant, or better still a night-club, and in it occupying troops or liberated civilians in a new and temporary freedom, swaying in gentle restrained passion on a small, sprung dance-floor under lights softer by far than these, might they or some or one of them feel suddenly a coldness, even with the wine in him and

his girl's warmth close against him under the soft light, even then, perhaps, a shiver or a sudden spark of horror imparted from these stones under their glossy hangings or their new coat of whitewash? . . . Perhaps there'd be dancing upstairs, in a hall made out of Grauermann's and Loskutov's and Kapanen's rooms all thrown into one, and on the side there'd be this more secret floor with couches and an occasional candle in the gaps between the curtains, and here, then, in that hired natural moment of the *Now, now this!*—in that moment of the frantic, futile, gin-stained reaching coitus there'd be destruction to the paid-for pleasure, quick fear and poor Slota's frenzied screaming, his fingers rasping on the smooth, implacable stones. Slota's mark—all of our marks—should we alone suffer?

Studený looked down at Slota's body, and he thought: Does it matter? Aren't we a speck in the middle of the tortured millions? Why should *our* spirits live, why should *our* small fate imprint itself on any lasting medium? He looked down at the Pole's dead body, and he thought: Nothing can help us now but our own strength, and that's what they're out to take from us. They aren't doing so badly, at that.

Studený looked up from the sign of his own wrecked purpose, and in the start of the action, before he knew why he was taking his eyes away from it and to the door, before his mind registered consciously the fact of its opening, he knew that in this moment, in this stirring of his pulse and Majerle's grunted awakening beside him, in the quick mutter of surprise or alarm from the Frenchman between

them, in all these small accustomed sounds and movements he recognised a turning-point, a climax. Not for him, but something to do with these others, something to do with the life of the cell around him, in which in his long isolation he felt himself to be removed, an observer in the corner of the stage. He saw Toivo's familiar bulk in the open doorway, and he heard his voice: Toivo sounded tired, irritable; he stood there glaring like an angry tethered bull out of his own cage of dull and limited perception, brute force, into the bright arena of his charges who, although at his mercy, held him captive.

On his sixteenth birthday Toivo had been inducted into this profession: his father had taken him along that morning, and he'd been glad to go, glad of the change from pushing a barrow for a Moscow butcher. Not that he'd ever felt complaint, let alone voiced it: they'd put him between the barrow's shafts when he was nine years old, and he'd been lucky to get the job. By the time he was sixteen he knew the feel of the job, and that was his life and nobody ever told him of any other. He knew the weight of each carcase before he took it in his hands and humped it off the barrow on to his already broad and stooping shoulders: he was a part of the barrow, the bleeding sides of cattle were his life and from the smell of the bleeding more than from the shape he could tell what sort of animal it had been. But the blood he smelt on his sixteenth birthday was different. It was the blood of a Prince. He smelt it in a Moscow cellar on the morning of his sixteenth birthday, and as he was simple, wrapped up in his own mind, which had

on either side of it a cart's shaft, making a clear division between it and the rest of whatever went on outside of it, well, as he was simple and easily upset by something new like the smell of a man's blood instead of a sheep's or a goat's he cried and turned to run back to the smells he knew and was at home with, but he stumbled on the slime of the cellar's steps, he slipped and lay there yelling like a huge baby. His father dragged him to his knees and swore at him, furious at being let down by his only son: he struck Toivo again and again and screamed harshly into his face that he'd disgraced his family and betrayed the high principles of the Revolution; he'd done those and other loathesome things. The upshot of it was that young Toivo was given into the prison service. He'd been there ever since, and the walls of cells and their heavy doors, these and human beings had taken the place of the barrow's shafts and the corpses of cattle, sheep and pigs. It was a different life, that was all, an adult occupation: the first had been childhood, this was manhood and for ever: there was nothing further than this.

Now Toivo was irritable because he couldn't remember the new one's name, the one he'd been sent for. How could you remember so many names? And how could you call a man if you didn't know his name? It got you muddled—made you wonder if you'd even come to the right cell. That'd be dreadful, a nightmare even to think of it.

"Hey! The new one, that foreign one—hey, which one?"

Studený looked down at the side of Slota's quiet

face: Majerle leant forward, resting his forehead on his updrawn knees. He muttered:

"Pierre. You he wants. God, oh, by heaven, Pierre——!" Well, there weren't words for it. There'd always been the words that counted for facts and actions, those counting, working words, yes, even words for women, that other language. Now there weren't any. He raised his head and stared at La Housse. For a moment Pierre's eyes met his, they said without anyone else knowing that they were anything but blank: It's all right. I can manage my end of it—if you can handle yours. Pierre stood up. He rose to his feet smoothly and easily, undamaged. They hadn't needed to hurt him, to waste their time and energy on a proved case.

"You want me?" Toivo nodded happily. It'd been easy, after all, no need to worry. He beckoned, sweeping his forearm to and fro horizontally like the sweep-and-chop of a scythe.

Kapanen grunted: "Heavier than he looks. Wouldn't it be easier if we really carried him, so his feet won't drag?"

"Wait." Loskutov stopped, swivelled Moke around against the wall of the passage. "You! Stop acting, eh?" Loskutov shot a glance at the other Russian. It said: *I know how to deal with this one.* "You're not dead yet—not yet. Use your feet walk!"

They took him off the wall and now his feet dragged less, they seemed to take some of the weight. Losku-

tov muttered: "That's better . . . keep going." Kapanen's arched eyebrows gathered themselves higher in surprise.

"Wouldn't have thought he had it in him. . . . Oh! Look at this lot! Who has the right of way?" He giggled. Loskutov looked up, up along the damp, gritty corridor wide enough only for the two with Moke between them, and he saw Toivo lumbering heavily towards them with another prisoner beside him. A remarkably clean prisoner who walked straight and easy like an ordinary man walks along a street. Not like a prisoner at all. Loskutov thought: The Colonel'll soon change that. He shouted, his voice booming down the concrete passage:

"Out of the way, you!"

Moke smiled to himself and murmured, "Gangway!" It was an expression that had tickled him years ago when an Old Boy, who had gone into the Navy, was visiting the school and had found difficulty in making his way through a corridor packed with boys who were queuing outside the dispensary. The Old Boy had shouted:

"Gangway!"—and the boys had been so impressed that they'd parted down the middle and let him through immediately. Even the Old Boy had looked vaguely surprised. At the time of this apparent miracle Moke had thought that he'd keep the magic password in his mind and use it on some future occasion, but although the occasion had arisen time and time again since then, he'd never been able to

bring the word out into the open and see its effect. Somehow it hadn't been possible to use it. Perhaps what had stopped him using it had been the vision of its power failing, a hundred curious amused faces in place of the cleared pathway to heaven. Instead, he spoke from long habit and with the quaver of old timidity:

"Boys, please . . . Oh, Smithers, mind, please . . ."

But now in a dream which was a mercy, which he could not recognise as anything except the muffled fog of daydream, he called "Gangway!", and although to him it was a call it was nothing but a grated whisper which none but he could hear, and he only in his mind; and that was the way it had always been, all that time ago, always been no one hearing him except when it was something to snigger or jeer at. All of it wrong and misunderstood somewhere, hard to put your finger on the centre of it, the reason, hard to tell how the younger men who were interested only in themselves and in their futures drew all the liking and applause, while he, Moke, who lived only to be allowed to be a part of this and accepted as an essential in it, drew nothing but the power of their collective and almost, as it seemed, organised contempt. Don't have favourites, everyone said, but how could he help liking that lad Braid, that independent little cuss who—well, who *what*? All right, thought Moke, grinning to himself inside his broken face while he thought about the child Braid: All right, nothing much. Nothing a man could point out exactly, not the 'this' and 'that' of it. Like a son, a sort of tough sympathy that you felt from him: no, not sym-



pathy, some other word—respect? Respect, yes, that, for a man as an individual from a child who was already halfway to being a man because he had his own respects which weren't governed by the disrespects of his fellows. That was about it. His attitude was never toadying, thought Moke, because there could never have been anything to gain.

So instead of calling, "Gangway!" he'd asked them, "Mind, please!"—and he did now, hearing the scraping feet ahead, but at the same time he looked back on it all and his lips tried to move and he thought, "Gangway!" Funny little dream, he thought, funny little longing, to be like that self-confident youngster with his nautical phrase and power of command, to have the boys jump aside with surprise and admiration in their small alert eyes and mouths! But he tried again, now; he called: "Gangway!"

And it worked! On one of them, admittedly, the bulk behind still blocked the corridor, but the first one stood aside, and Moke saw the mud on his knees, on his shorts and shirt, mud clinging in great clods of the football field to the edges of his boots, mud and the greenish smears of crushed grass on the white check of the school colours. Braid. Jimmy Braid standing aside and not saying anything. Moke thought: I shouldn't have shouted like that, it wasn't necessary, I didn't know it was Braid. I'm getting loud, insensitive. He smiled and nodded at Braid. . . .

He smiled and nodded at Pierre La Housse. He said as he passed him:

"Nice to see you. Like old times." He thought:

Mustn't show favouritism. "Best of luck in the second half. Stick it out."

Grauermann had stepped out of his door behind the trio of Loskutov and Kapanen and the dragging, mumbling Englishman: stood there waiting for Toivo to bring the Frenchman along for a few simple questions before the formal sentence of death which had already been pronounced by Higher Authority. Grauermann had been standing there impatient at the delay—he wanted his breakfast—while the two groups had slowed, manœuvring to pass each other by, and hearing Moke's words, which the other Russians had ignored as being only some more of the mumbling madness, he'd stiffened, watching and listening. Now he stared at Moke's stooped back as the three moved slowly down the passage, Moke stumbling and the men on either side of him rubbing along the walls as they jerked him forward step by step towards the stairs which led down to the cells and the punishment of the Lastochka. Grauermann stood staring after them; he hardly noticed Toivo shoving the new prisoner into his room. Toivo muttered:

"Here he is. Huh—Colonel. . . . You asked for this one, didn't you?" Toivo thought: I suppose he won't want him, now. Suppose he's changed his blasted mind and I'll have to cart this back again.

"Yes." Grauermann came in out of the passage, making Toivo back farther into the room instead of passing him, so that he could get out and shut the

door. "Yes. Stay here with us. I'll need you again, in a moment." Grauermann walked round to the far side of his desk: there was an unusual briskness, a certain cheerful strut to his movements, and looking at the Frenchman he opened his mouth to speak, but only laughed instead. He seemed to be genuinely amused. Still laughing, he reached for his chair, sank into it and shook in silent amusement while he studied La Housse. Pierre asked:

"Something amuses you? My appearance causes this mirth?" The Frenchman seemed detached from his situation, uncaring. He asked easily: "Can't we share the joke?" Grauermann nodded. Even this plain insolence hadn't spoiled his good humour.

"Your name is—Pierre La Housse. You're a Frenchman, and employed by Western Intelligence—so called?"

"You know it. Why should we waste time? Would you like me to say that I'm Father Christmas? Let's get it over with, shall we?" Grauermann smiled. He really looked happy, almost friendly:

"You met a friend outside a moment ago. He greeted you in English. You speak English, of course?"

"Of course." This was unexpected, a new trick. Pierre waited to see where the line led. The Russian was still grinning at him.

"Didn't you recognise your old friend Trotter? Your so well-known colleague? He knew *you* all right—have we changed him so much that you didn't know *him*?"

Pierre hadn't been ready for anything like this.

He'd been braced hard to take the formal sentence and possibly a rough handling, he'd shaped his mind to the acceptance of what had to come. It hadn't been a new idea to get used to, it had always been there as a possibility, even in the early, carefree days when the jobs had been fun, sport: and now in the last few hours while he'd seemed to be asleep he'd been telling himself: Now it's here, I've asked for it and always accepted it as a fifty-fifty chance, now all I have to do is to take it and there's no more worry. All I have to do is to take it and give nothing.

But this was unexpected. And—yes, by God!—a gift! If that wreck which he'd passed in the passage could become Trotter and die Trotter, well, the Trotter they were all looking for would be dead and the real Harry Trotter would stand a solid chance of getting out and finishing the job. In his mind Pierre saw the heavy figure bowed in an attitude of devotion while his fingers probed the inside of the hassock, found and took the flimsy sheets which were worth lives because they stood for Life. . . . He told Grauermann:

"I'm to be shot in any case, am I not?" His eyes searched the Russian's face, and as though he'd read the answer in those bleak impersonal eyes Pierre looked down at the dirty cup-and-saucer on the desk. His gesture of looking down could have been interpreted as a sign of some inner shame. . . . "All right. It makes no difference to any of us now. He's dying, isn't he?"

Grauermann asked him: "So it is Harry Trotter, eh? I was right?"

La Housse nodded, not looking at anything now except at the short space of boards between his feet and the desk. He nodded, and he thought to himself: A bullet in the head'll be easier for that poor devil, whoever he is, than what he's getting now. And in any case, this is a bigger thing than one life or another. . . .

"Yes. Yes, he's Trotter." Suddenly his eyes flashed up to meet Grauermann's, his face was contorted with what looked like pain but sounded more like fury when he screamed:

"What is it you've done to him? *You*, you swine, you foul thing which the Devil wouldn't own, what did you do? By——"

Grauermann raised a hand, requesting more than demanding silence: he was rolling slowly from side to side of his chair, from one round buttock to the other. He told the Frenchman, who stood there trembling with real tears in his eyes:

"Easy, *please* . . . I assure you, if we'd known who he was we wouldn't have touched him. It's a case of —mistaken identity. But he could have told us himself, you know, and spared himself all of it. Couldn't he?" Grauermann couldn't get the grin off his face. Really, the whole situation was ludicrous. He told La Housse confidentially: "It's been a most extraordinary mix up, really." He told Toivo over his shoulder: "Ask Mister Loskutov to bring his prisoner up here. Tell him that—" Grauermann glanced quickly, delightedly at La Housse—"Tell Mister Loskutov that he is on no account to use force of any kind on his prisoner. But I want him here immediately."

Toivo stood there gaping at his chief. "Colonel, you're joking—you're——"

"Go!" Grauermann's good humour changed in a second to blind rage. He raised his clenched fists on either side of his face and he yelled at Toivo:

"Get out, you ape! I don't want your stupid comments, blast you! Get Trotter, Doncaster, Loskutov—*get out!*" Toivo backed against the wall, half-way to the door. He asked:

"Don'ster, yes, and Mister Loskutov. Yes, Colonel. But Trorrer, who's——?" Grauermann closed his eyes for a moment. Then he opened them, and stared at Toivo. He said quietly:

"Do what I told you. Just what I told you. Nothing else, Toivo, no need to think. Go along, now."

Kapanen had finished overhauling the ropes. They hadn't been used for a couple of weeks, not since Slota, but now he had them sorted out of the twisted bunch under the single-sheaved pulley: the two working parts, one for the feet and the other for the hands, were spliced together so that when the body was hauled up and secured the join of the two parts would come immediately under the block. At the lower end of each of the joined ropes was an iron hook to hold the two strops which fitted wrists and ankles. Kapanen let the single hauling rope run through the fingers of his right hand while with his left he jerked the business end of the apparatus down until the two hooks clanked as they touched the stone

floor. Moke lay there on his face where they'd dropped him.

Loskutov had the strops in his hands. He passed one over to Kapanen, and pointed at the Englishman's feet. He himself bent and grabbed hold of one of Moke's hands: he gripped it quickly between his knees, squatting, while he doubled the strop through its own part so that it formed a noose. Holding it carefully in that shape he jerked up Moke's other hand, held the two wrists together and slipped the noose over them. He held the two wrists with the noose around them in his left hand, and he pulled the strop upwards with his right, drawing it upwards so that it took the backward and downward pull of Moke's arms. Then, keeping the end of the strop up, he grabbed one of the hooks and slipped it into the loop.

"*Come on!*" Kapanen was making a mess of his end of the job. He'd noosed Moke's ankles together, but he let go of the strop to reach for the other hook, and the strop fell open so that, cursing quietly but viciously, he had to start again and re-noose the ankles. Loskutov drew in a sharp, impatient breath. "Hell! Get a bloody move on!" Kapanen shot him a quick, angry look.

"All right, all right! What's all the hurry? Any-one'd think a minute mattered!" At last he'd fixed it: he held his own hook up with the strop over it, and he reached for the hauling part of the tackle. He jerked it down, taking up the slack so that both of them could let go of their ends and stand back. Kapanen stared down at the back of Moke's head.

“Well—this’ll be the end of him.” He glanced enquiringly at Loskutov, but, seeing only a blank impatience, he shrugged his high, square shoulders. “All right. You ready?” Loskutov pointed at the rope in the other’s hands.

“Pull him up.” Kapanen stepped slightly to one side, clear of Moke’s feet, and the block turned with him on its swivel. He reached up the rope for a long pull, pressing his lips tightly together for the expected effort. Then his face relaxed and he looked round and down at Loskutov.

“What is this—your prisoner, or mine?” Loskutov blinked. He stepped quickly forward.

“I’ll give you a hand, since you need it.” He reached up, and his hands knotted themselves around the rope just below Kapanen’s. He was shifting his feet for a good stand when Toivo stuck his massive head around the heavy, open door.

“Hey! You’re not to hurt him! D’you hear?”

They stood there motionless in the half-light streaking from the doorway. It’d been a good enough light before Toivo’d shoved his bulk into the gap. Both of them twisted round to gape at the excited moron whose shout still mumbled echoes in the high stone ceiling. Then Kapanen saw the funny side of it, and laughed. He chuckled:

“The idiot’s all liquored up. That’s where the stuff’s been going, eh?” He laughed again. The two of them stood there with their arms up on the rope, like a couple of unruly bellringers waiting for the vicar’s word to start ringing. Then Loskutov let go of the rope and faced Toivo.



"You out of your mind completely? You missing link you, you bloody maniac, d'you need a lesson, eh?" He swung his head, and gestured meaningly at the ropes and their ready burden. "Eh?"

"Colonel's orders." Toivo pushed the door open wider, so that more light flooded in over the stage set for another slow murder. He looked sternly at Loskutov and nodded confirmation of his own words.

"Says you're to bring him upstairs straight away and to treat him gentle. Colonel says so, see?"

That first sight was still in his eyes and photographed on to his brain, and it was for him, that rack, not for Slota or for any other body, for him: the long nightmare had become fact, it was here and now and in a moment there'd be a new Now which would be agony, appalling agony, and it would last a certain time, long enough for them to leave him there while they rested from their own efforts and then come back to let him down and pour water over him and ask him in a different tone:

"You'll sign, huh?"—and for him to say: "Yes, I'll sign", or if he couldn't speak at all by then, to nod. Because he'd sign, if they asked him, if they asked him now with the ropes close to him he'd sign, he knew that. He thought: This long, and all the length of it, all the pain, now they can have what they want if they'll only ask. These ropes are my cowardice, my surrender, it's not a thing inside of me, it's this filthy pattern of rope and what I saw in it when they brought me here before, like a child

being taken for a treat to Madame Tussaud's. There has to be a limit and this is mine.

Then he realised that he hadn't screamed yet, that in spite of the horror he hadn't begged them: Let me sign! And he realised without seeing a reason for it that by a short step *he had already passed his limit*. He'd thought before, comforting himself in the depth of his fear: 'They'll never put me on the ropes, because before they go that far I'll sign anything they want.'

But he heard the clink of the hooks let down and striking the stone beside him, he dragged at the inside of his mind and asked himself: Please, tell them you'll sign! Don't let's go through with it, please, there's an exit and it isn't barred. Yet when he tried the door of that exit he found that it was indeed barred, so heavily and securely barred that it was no longer an exit at all, there wasn't a way out except *that* way, strung up there close to the ceiling and nothing he could do until they asked him again, "Sign!" He promised himself: *Then!* Already his arms and legs were in the air, on the ropes, and there was a shouting, a confused sound of argument close above him. There was less light than there had been and the ropes hadn't moved him yet, it hadn't started: the tension suddenly fell away from his arms and legs, he felt them drop, and a moment later he was being lifted, but not on the ropes. He was on his feet, that slab of light was the doorway bright and empty, and he was moving into it.

GRAUERMANN grinned at Loskutov's obvious puzzlement. He told him in Russian: •

"Don't look so surprised. The surprise is coming in a moment. Wait for it." He had the smug look of a conjuror about to produce a white rabbit from a borrowed hat.

The little room seemed crowded with the five of them in it: La Housse erect and pale on the other side of the desk, Moke slumped against the wall just inside the door, Toivo holding him up against it and obviously disinterested in the proceedings. Loskutov stood close to the corner of the desk where Grauermann lolled happily in his chair. Grauermann stifled a yawn. •

"Doncaster!" The Englishman showed no sign of having heard his name, and Grauermann called more loudly, sharply: "Doncaster!"

"Yes?" Only a whisper, but it was enough, it showed that he could hear even if he couldn't see.

"You recognise this man here? This one?" Moke nodded. It didn't necessarily mean Yes, I recognise him, it could have been only the nervous movement of a sick man's head.

"You do, eh? Then what's his name? . . . This friend of yours—what's he called? The truth, mind!"

What did it matter what his name was? Whoever he was, he'd taken him off those ropes: this inexplicable mercy had come from this silent shape of a man who stood there without moving and seemed to be waiting to know whether or not he was recognisable. Deny him, deny the gift in the act of its giving: had the cock crowed that many times? Moke whispered into the waiting quiet:

"Yes . . . Yes, of course . . ." Grauermann just about yelped with delight! He jerked upright in his chair.

"Fine! Oh, the time I've wasted! The time I'd have saved if I'd had the sense to see what was right under my bloody nose!" He said aside to Loskutov, "Take this as a lesson, eh?" Turning back to face Moke he frowned and asked: "Well, what's his name?"

"Name?" Still that queer nodding of the head.

"That's what we want. Name. Who is he?" Loskutov stared dumbly from one to the other: he still didn't understand. His chief asked again: "Doncaster—who is this friend of yours?"

Well, who was a friend and who wasn't? What was a name and what was his own? Only this was a friend, because standing there he counterbalanced the Lastochka which hung there on the other side, like some filthy crushing spider with its legs wide and poised, and already he'd known how they felt when they licked over and around and fumbled in cruel haste for the grip which would take a man's body into that hellish space between floor and ceiling. *His* body. Yet here he was now and there was his

friend and nobody was arched against the ceiling in the dark. He looked at the shape of his friend and he muttered: "Good . . . friend . . ."

Grauermann asked again: "What's the name of this good friend of yours?" Moke's head dropped so that his chin rested on his breastbone, and he said clearly to the floor:

"I can't see. I don't know——" La Housse moved quickly forward towards the desk and towards Grauermann: Loskutov sprang around the side of the desk and grabbed the Frenchman's left arm. He had one hand on the wrist and the other behind the elbow, he twisted and pressed at the same time and La Housse stood still bent a little sideways with the pain showing in his face. Grauermann hadn't shifted an inch: he might not have noticed that anyone had moved. He smiled at La Housse, and asked gently:

"What is it? Something you want to say?"

"Haven't you done enough to him? Aren't you satisfied that he isn't a man any longer, that he's near dead, you filthy creeping bastard, you Devil's tool!" La Housse winced at the increased pressure on his arm, and he shouted: "Let him be, let him die!"

Grauermann nodded. "All right. . . . As I told you, we didn't know who he was, or we'd have looked after him more carefully. Look at him. He's Trotter?" But La Housse looked only at the Russian, and he shook his head, bent sideways with Loskutov still pressing on the bend of his arm.

"No. . . . No, I won't look at him. I can't. He's the

best friend I ever had and you've killed him—nearly killed him, and what's worse—killed him——”

“Not quite. But he's Trotter, Harry Trotter?”

“Of course. You've known it all along, haven't you? If you hadn't been waiting to get me you'd have killed him before. I suppose you forced from him what led to me, eh? . . . All right. But now let's get it over with. You've got what you were after, haven't you?” Grauermann chuckled.

“More than I was after. Much more. But all right.” He shuffled around among the papers littering his desk, found the one he wanted and handed it to Loskutov. “This warrant'll cover the two of them. Ten o'clock. Till then, put them in separate cells.” Loskutov nodded, but for the first time Toivo showed some interest. He growled:

“Can't do that. All full up, Colonel. Soon as one goes, there's another couple. You'll see, there'll be half a dozen to take the place of these two. Fed up, that's what I am, sick and tired of it——” Loskutov told Grauermann:

“He's right, for once. There isn't one cell empty, let alone two. Does it matter?” Grauermann saw the point.

“No, of course it doesn't. Only an hour, and what difference can it make? Let them sob on each others' shoulders, if they want to. Put them back where they came from.” He looked at his watch, a Rolex on a metal strap, and he added, “*Less* than an hour.”

Loskutov asked La Housse, “You satisfied? Had your fling? Ready to help your little friend down to his apartment?” La Housse nodded, and Loskutov

let go of his arm. If there'd just been the two of them there he'd have given it an extra twist for fun.

"Toivo. This one'll help you with that rubbish." He pointed at Moke. "Stick them both back in B2. Then come back up here. Understand?"

Toivo waited until La Housse was on Moke's other side, then he hooked an arm around the Englishman's body. But as they passed out through the doorway into the passage, he stopped, looking back over his shoulder: La Housse stopped, too, thrown partly off his balance as Moke swung against him. Toivo told Loskutov, over his shoulder:

"Haven't had any breakfast yet. A man needs to eat now and then if he's got to work all day and night like a bloody horse and no sleep, he's got to have food——"

"You'll have plenty of time for breakfast. Get on, do what you're told and shut up." Loskutov slammed the door behind them, and Grauermann laughed.

"Whatever that disgruntled thing says, this is quite a clearance. Those two—and that Yugoslav's to go back to the SNB where he belongs—three in one morning isn't so bad. It's encouraging!"

Loskutov pulled a rickety chair out of the far corner. He sat down wearily. "Hell, but I'm tired! That blasted Englishman . . . you say we're sending the Jug back? I always wondered why we had him."

Grauermann agreed. He picked at his nose with the little finger of his left hand, and then stared closely at what he'd found.

"They're a bunch of nitwits, the SNB. Fools, like

all Czechs. But I dare say they'll learn, in time. They'll learn."

La Housse shouldered all of Moke's weight while Toivo unbolted the door marked in white letters B2. Toivo flung the door open. He looked at La Housse, but the Frenchman shook his head.

"It's all right. I can manage him." Toivo stood aside to let them pass, waited impatiently, still thinking about his missed breakfast, until they were far enough in for him to swing the door shut behind them. He shot the bolt on the outside, thinking that he'd have to hurry to get something to eat before the soldiers arrived.

Majerle stepped over Studeny's legs, and three long, urgent strides took him across the cell and face to face with La Housse. His broad back blanked them from Studeny's quiet gaze. La Housse muttered:

"You're safe, Harry. They aren't looking for Trotter any longer. They've found him. You're safe, you can finish the job." Majerle stared down at him, trying to understand.

"How—Why——" La Housse spoke loudly for Studeny to hear:

"Give him a moment. Then you take that arm, and we'll get him into the corner." Much more quietly he told his friend: "They think that this Englishman is Harry Trotter. I let them think so, and he's too far gone to deny it. He doesn't know what's happening. Look—it's a mercy for him. And it's life for you, it's the job, Harry." Pierre spoke



rapidly, urgently, fighting the plain horror which he could see looking at him out of the wide, dark eyes. "It means the job, Harry." And loudly, "Well, ready?"

Together they helped Moke to the corner where Walzel had sat and where Slota had died. Studeny watched them without any real interest. As though he was only making polite conversation, trying to show an interest which he lacked because he was pre-occupied with his own new emptiness, he asked:

"What's up? Have they finished him, too?" La Housse stared down at Moke. He was thinking: Really, it makes no difference. Only the shortening of his life by a day or two, and at that an easier end to it. But I wish he could know the value of his death . . . La Housse answered Studeny:

"Him and me. They're going to shoot us. In about half an hour. We're going to be shot, the two of us." Funny, he thought, a week ago I was shaking with fright at something I only imagined: now it's real and I can tell this queer old fellow: "I'm going to be shot." The idea of it doesn't even stir my blood. Studeny asked him:

"Why?" He'd taken a long look at Moke, propped there in the corner beside him, and that one look had been enough to tell him that any bullet would be wasted. They've only to leave him for a day, he thought, perhaps less, and they can save themselves the trouble.

"Why him? . . . You, you told me, that's reasonable. But him: why shouldn't he wait for it like I have to?"

La Housse lay down on his back, full length. He closed his eyes and rested his right forearm across them to cut out the hard light.

"His real name is Harry Trotter. We've worked together for years. We were in it together. They've got us both, they've won."

Studený clasped his arms around his knees, and stared at Moke. He muttered: "I can't believe it! I wouldn't have thought it possible—what an act he put on! What an actor!" La Housse thought: You haven't seen anything, *mon vieux*. You should have seen me up there with real tears pouring out of my eyes while I cursed them for what they'd done to my "friend". If anyone ever deserved an Oscar, hand it quickly to La Housse. . . . Well now, twenty more minutes? He turned his head, and looked at the real Harry Trotter, the plain, rough Canadian whose father had made his living as a lumberjack. He looked hard at this tough womanising whisky-drinking friend of his who was supposed to be a Yugoslav spiv.

Trotter didn't look easy. He didn't look like a man condemned to live. He looked more like a man who wasn't taking easily to the idea of another man dying in his name. And the Frenchman thought suddenly: I'm better off than you are. I'd rather have my end of it than live with what you'll have to remember. You won't be Trotter any more, you'll be a Trotter-out-of-Doncaster, you won't ever be yourself again. But you can't do a thing about it, Harry, because it isn't your well-being that counts any more than my life or Doncaster's death matters a damn. It's the

thing we're *for*, that's what counts, that's what rules us. Nobody made us this way, nobody forced us into it: it's what we saw happening and the way we felt it, it's the fun we've had all that time . . . This thing is us. It owns us and we have no right to argue now, because we gave ourselves to it not only for the easy winning times but also for the hard losing ones, not only for better but also for worse. And you know it, Harry; I can see it in your eyes even now while you're thinking how you'd like to go back to being sixteen again with an old soft hat of your father's on your head and dedicate your life to nothing bigger than felling trees. . . .

Moke was awake. He said suddenly:

"I'm hungry. Aren't they bringing us anything to eat today?" Studeny put a hand on his shoulder.

"Later, my friend. Later. You missed a couple of our usual sumptuous meals while you were upstairs." Studeny asked La Housse, quietly: "Doesn't he know?"

"No. I don't think so. He doesn't know anything much at the moment. Not after——" Majerle spoke harshly from the other side.

"Tell him!"

"My dear fellow!" Studeny raised his eyebrows at Majerle. "Why on earth——?"

"Tell him!" The big man stared at La Housse. "Tell him what's going to happen. What is he, a dog, to be taken by surprise?"

La Housse nodded. He moved around Studeny and

crouched beside the Englishman. Moke smiled at him.

"Hello."

"Hello . . . Listen, my old friend. I've something to tell you."

"Yes. I can't see you properly, I'm afraid, but I know your voice. I've been hearing it while I slept." He stretched out his right hand, groping, and La Houssé quickly grasped it in his own.

"Listen. There'll be no more pain. You understand? No more pain. You and I—they're going to shoot us. Soon. The two of us together." His hand held Moke's harder than he'd ever held a hand before. "We'll be together and there'll be nothing more to hurt either of us. They can't touch us, after that." He was scared of the telling, but even more scared, now that he'd started, to stop and give the Englishman's shock an outlet. But he paused, because he was short of words, and Moke spoke gently:

"No, there won't be, will there, not after that? Tell me—I'm ashamed to admit it, but my memory . . . tell me, I haven't signed anything, have I?" He asked: "I didn't sign those papers?"

"No." La Housse still held the limp hand in his. "You didn't sign any paper."

"That's good. I'm so glad. You know, I don't seem to grasp things, to remember . . ." Moke nodded to himself. Then he asked: "But *you* remember, don't you? You're sure, you'll remember, and tell them?"

La Housse opened his mouth, although there was no answer ready to his tongue, but he had no need to

answer because Majerle did it for him, sharply as though the words hurt him: •

“Nobody is likely to forget!”

Feet in the passage outside, and the feet stopping and the bolt rasping as it had often done, but this time with more meaning, only Moke heard none of it. His mind was away on its own, looking and feeling for something he wanted and needed to hold. And, with his hand in the Frenchman's, as the door swung back another door swung too, and seeing through it he found what he sought, greeted it and let it fill his mind and his heart. Deep green of the playing-fields stretching possessively between the grey stone of the school buildings and the lighter green, the start of the Downs' upward sweep, rising to the sharp, curved edge where sky began: any man's sky, but down again, not any man's the heavy green and the white goalposts needle-sharp, the old grey stone and the softness, soft country falling easily towards the ancient spires of Lewes. No, not *any* man's: but his!

His, for all time.





















